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# HORAE SABBATICAE

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# CONTENTS

ESSAY	PAGE
I. HOBBS ON GOVERNMENT . . . . .	1
II. HOBBS'S 'LEVIATHAN' . . . . .	19
III. HOBBS'S MINOR WORKS . . . . .	36
IV. SOVEREIGNTY . . . . .	54
V. BOSSUET'S EDUCATION OF THE DAUPHIN . . . . .	71
VI. BOSSUET AND THE PROTESTANTS . . . . .	88
VII. LOCKE'S ESSAY ON THE HUMAN UNDERSTAND- ING . . . . .	106
VIII. LOCKE AS A MORALIST . . . . .	123
IX. LOCKE ON GOVERNMENT . . . . .	140
X. LOCKE ON TOLERATION . . . . .	157
XI. THE SCEPTICISM OF BAYLE . . . . .	174
XII. MANDEVILLE . . . . .	193
XIII. VOLTAIRE AS A THEOLOGIAN, MORALIST, AND METAPHYSICIAN . . . . .	211

ESSAY	PAGE
XIV. <sup>6</sup> BISHOP BUTLER . . . . .	280
XV.    ,,       ,,       . . . . .	296
XVI. WARBURTON'S 'DIVINE LEGATION' . . .	315
XVII. WARBURTON'S MINOR WORKS . . . .	333
XVIII. THE MISCELLANEOUS WORKS OF CONYERS	
MIDDLETON . . . . .	349
XIX. HUME'S ESSAYS . . . . .	367
XX. GIBBON . . . . .	386
XXI. GIBBON'S MEMOIRS . . . . .	402

## HOBBES ON GOVERNMENT<sup>1</sup>

NOTWITHSTANDING the unpopularity, amounting almost to infamy, with which his name was long, and in some measure is still, surrounded, Hobbes has a right to be considered as the father of modern English philosophy, and indeed as the father of that great school of thought which at present has possession of the greater part of the intelligence of Europe. Hobbes leads straight to Locke, and in some particulars goes beyond him. Locke was the teacher of Berkeley. Berkeley was the master of Hume. In Hume are to be found the germs—and highly developed germs they are—of the most valuable part

<sup>1</sup> *Philosophical Rudiments concerning Government and Society ; or, a Dissertation concerning Man in his several Habitudes and Respects as the Member of a Society, first secular and then sacred. Containing the Elements of Civil Politic in the Agreement which it hath both with Natural and Divine Laws, in which is demonstrated both what the Origin of Justice is, and wherein the Essence of Christian Religion doth consist ; together with the Nature, Limits, and Qualifications both of Regiment and Subjection.* By Thomas Hobbes. 1651.

of Comte, and the leading doctrines of the school of which Bentham, Austin, and James and John Mill are the most conspicuous members. Nay, in a sense, Hume was the progenitor of Kant, for Kant's concessions in the negative direction were made to satisfy Hume's speculations, and his positive doctrines were meant to act as fortifications against them. Hobbes, again, must have taken much of the tone of his mind from his master (in the literal sense of the word), Bacon; and thus we have an unusually distinct catena of philosophy for very nearly three hundred years, from Bacon to our own days.

Hobbes, like other writers of his day, is much more often talked about than studied, and it may be doubted whether the true character of his doctrines, and their relation to some of the most vigorous forms of modern speculation, is as well understood as it deserves to be. In illustration of this subject we propose to examine shortly some of the leading propositions of one of the most characteristic of his books—his treatise on the general principles of Government. It cannot, of course, be fully understood in all its connections without reference to other parts of the author's works and theories; but it forms a connected whole in reference to one of the principal subjects of human thought, and affords one of the best specimens of its author's turn of mind.

Notwithstanding its elaborate title-page, the treatise on Government is very short. It consists only of about 360 small 8vo pages, but its brevity is

the result of the sternest and most resolute compression, and the consequence is that reading it is like reading mathematics. Unless you stop to think at almost every sentence, the impression derived from it is nearly worthless. Indeed, a person must be very familiar both with the subject and the author who gets much benefit from a single reading.

The difficulty arises not only from the mathematical closeness of the thought, but from the character of the thought itself. It belongs to a past age, and proceeds upon assumptions which few understand, and with which fewer still can be expected to sympathise. Hobbes's writings are an admirable illustration of the fact that there is a slow but real progress in moral philosophy. He is half ancient and half modern. He has, as it were, cracked the shell of the old methods of inquiry, but he has not completely freed himself from the old terminology. He speaks, for instance, in the terms of Roman law, but he obviously saw and felt the fundamental problems which the Roman lawyers never even tried to solve, and of which the solution is still by no means completely ascertained.

'*Suum cuique tribuere*' was the end which the Roman lawyers proposed to themselves, assuming that there were some independent means of finding out what '*suum*' meant. In a certain sense, they succeeded in this undertaking. They found a practical solution of the question, which was no doubt one of the greatest monuments of practical sagacity



ever erected, but they did not solve the speculative difficulty. They hardly seem to have felt it.

This was Hobbes's starting-point: 'When I applied my thoughts to the investigation of natural justice I was presently advertised, from the very word justice (which signifies a steady will of giving every one his own),' [this is a translation of the first words of the *Institutes*], 'that my first inquiry was to be whence it proceeded that any one should call anything rather his own than another man's.' The whole of his book is meant as an answer to this and analogous questions. It naturally, and indeed inevitably, assumes the way of thinking of his own generation, and this makes it very difficult at times to follow the argument in an entirely satisfactory manner. It is indeed necessary, in order to do so, to neglect a good many forms of expression, and to try to recast the book in a modern form. When this operation has been performed, the general result is to the following effect.

The general problem, as Hobbes seems to have conceived it, was to analyse society as he saw it, by showing the relation and dependence of its various parts, and thence inferring the conditions on which its permanence depends.

One observation arises on this point which shows the difference between the old and new schools of political and moral speculation. Such an inquiry as Hobbes undertook would in these days be considered as essentially historical. The inquiry would be as to the means by which, in point of fact and history,

society grew up. The book would open with speculations on cave men and kitchen middens, and would go on to the investigation of the different written records of the human race.

The advantages of this way of treating such questions have been so often pointed out that we need not discuss them; but some injustice is often done to the older method, and its value is so much underrated, and so frequently altogether denied, that it is worth while to observe, not only that in Hobbes's days the necessary materials for the historical mode of treatment did not exist, but also that the breadth and generality of the views which were derived from the other method were of the greatest value as a step in speculation.

Philosophical history would hardly have been possible without the impulse given to historical inquiry by such theories as those of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. Moreover, as analogies and hypotheses, these theories have a great independent value. Society was certainly not founded on an original compact, but the theory that it was, and the effort to view it in that light, taught us a variety of things which we should not otherwise have discovered.

The main results of this analysis are embodied in the following definitions of the terms most commonly employed in political speculation. Liberty is an absence of the 'restraints and hindrances of motion.' Dominion is coercive power exercised by and through laws. A law is 'the speech of him who by right

commands something to others to be done or omitted.' Right is defined somewhat obscurely, and Hobbes is not quite consistent in his use of the word. His definition is, 'that liberty which every man hath to make use of his natural faculties according to right reason.' 'Right reason in the state of nature' is every man's own reason; in a state of society, the reason of the sovereign. Good and Evil 'are names given to things to signify the inclination or aversion of them by whom they were given.'

These are the fundamental definitions of the book, but they are scattered about in various parts of it, and until they are extracted and brought into one view the want of them causes a good deal of obscurity. By their help it becomes easy, with a little rearrangement and alteration of language, to translate Hobbes's theories into a form in which they become intelligible to modern readers, and capable of being estimated at their true value.

The statement would be as follows: If no one or more men had the power of issuing to others such commands as appeared reasonable to themselves, there would be no such thing as society amongst men. Every one would be able to make whatever use he pleased of whatever faculties he possessed, and the only guide which he would have for the regulation of his conduct would be his own notions of what it was desirable for him to do. The existence of that kind of commands which we call laws is what stands between us and this state of things, which would be

a state of general confusion. This appears to be the true interpretation of the well-known paradox that the state of nature is a state of war—a most inoffensive and perfectly true proposition which became offensive only by the way in which it was put.

The next question is, How is one man or body of men enabled to give commands to other men, when the mere natural strength of individuals differs so little that, for practical purposes, the degree of strength possessed by each may be considered as being equal? This power can be given only by the combination of numerous persons for the purpose of creating a fund of power, and investing a single person or set of persons with the possession of it. Inasmuch as no agreement on the part of others can increase the strength of any muscles or the activity of any brain, the power of the ruler will ultimately be found to be constituted by the common resolution of the bulk of the subjects to maintain it.

When the grounds of this resolution are searched into, it will be found to rest on the ground of consistency. If the power transferred were resumed, its resumption would, of course, be resisted, and that resistance would produce a return to the state of confusion for the purpose of avoiding which the power itself was originally set up. 'A person so acting,' says Hobbes, 'falls into no less contradiction than he who in the schools is reduced to an absurdity.' The powers of the ruler are thus supreme and irrevocable, and their possession and exercise constitute dominion.

Now dominion and liberty are mutually exclusive, and, as rights are no more than 'ascertained and definite branches of liberty, it follows that they are constituted by law, which is the will of the ruler; that as against the ruler no one can have any rights, inasmuch as the existence of rights is dependent on the ruler's will; and that the ruler lies under no duties towards his subjects, for duties are the correlatives of rights; nor towards other rulers, for, as regards them, he is absolute and independent.

It would be a great injustice to Hobbes to suppose that he denied the existence or obligation of morality. On the contrary, he strongly urges it on rulers as well as on their subjects. Morality is, according to his view, the law of God. He draws out at length a scheme of morality, or the laws of nature, of which he enumerates twenty; but these, he observes, are not properly laws, because they are not commands, except in so far as and inasmuch as 'they are delivered by God in holy Scriptures' . . . 'for the sacred Scripture is the speech of God commanding over all things by greatest right.'

This is the foundation of Hobbes's theory of government. In his own language it takes a form which is open to some objection, and looks highly paradoxical. The commonest objection to it is in his use of the words 'right' and 'contract,' which we have intentionally avoided as much as possible in the summary of his views given above. His use of these terms no doubt lays him open to the charge,

which has been frequently brought against him, of making contract the foundation of law, and law the foundation of contract; but we think that those who will take the pains to try to understand his real meaning, will feel that the awkwardness, though undoubtedly real, lies rather in expression than in thought.

Hobbes appears to have understood by a contract, not merely an agreement, but a positive alteration, by two parties of their respective positions, with a view to their common advantage. I have a loaded pistol, and you have a dagger. If, in consideration of your throwing the dagger into a river, I fire the pistol in the air, it is obvious that our positions are altered, however much we may both wish afterwards for the *status quo ante*.

In this sense it is perfectly true that all society rests on compact, and also that the compact on which it rests is irrevocable except under extraordinary circumstances—as, for instance, if a great majority of the persons affected agreed to revoke it; and even then they might be unable to do so. The truth is, that Hobbes expressed in the language of his own time the doctrines of a later age, and tried to discuss in that language problems which in his time were very indistinctly conceived.

If his book were written in our days, it might well be entitled 'An Essay on Political Statism.' Its fundamental assumption is the continuous existence of an established government in a state of stable equilibrium;

and this, we think, is the true explanation of its author's absolutism. The existence of a stable government is his postulate throughout, and, assuming the existence of such an institution, he inquires what positions right, liberty, law, and rulers would occupy in it—what facts would correspond to those names; and it is very hard to deny that the result at which he arrives upon that supposition is entirely true.

It is the very same result which, expressed in different words and limited by the systematic introduction of the great principle of utility (which Hobbes rather apprehended than comprehended), was reached and inculcated with irresistible weight by Bentham and Austin. The aversion which is felt to these results, the dislike which people feel to the use of the words right, law, and liberty, in simple and definite senses, is precisely analogous to the dislike and indignation which many persons feel, and testify, against political economists, for studying the effects of the desire of gain abstractedly from the moral topics, from which, as they maintain, it ought never, even in thought and for a limited purpose, to be disjoined. The notion that a man who uses the word justice in the definite sense of adherence to a fixed rule, must necessarily be indifferent to the goodness or badness of the law which creates that rule, is exactly parallel to the notion that a political economist must, as such, be cruel and selfish.

The real weakness of Hobbes's views on government would seem to lie in his apparent unconscious-

ness of the fact that they are very limited, and leave entirely out of account what in our days would be called the dynamics of government. He analyses with accuracy the component parts of government, assuming it to be in a state of stable equilibrium, but he not only makes no provision for changes, but appears to regard their occurrence as the great evil of all which is to be avoided *per fas et nefas*, and under all conceivable contingencies. He seems to have been so thoroughly overcome by the confusions of the civil war, of which he had been a horrified observer, as to have thought, that all other imaginable evils were as mere dust in the balance, when weighed against the one evil of strife and confusion.

There are few more curious instances in literary history of the prodigious effect of contemporary events and personal prejudices, even on the most powerful mind, than the effect which the civil wars produced on Hobbes, and the horror which he felt of disturbance and danger, as the greatest of all evils. In these days it is altogether unnecessary to protest against this weakness. The answer to the greater part of his book is contained in the assertion, that the natural aversion of men to exertion and danger is so great, that there is much more reason to fear that they will endure oppression too long, than that they will fight for what is not worth having. The centripetal tendency has, since Hobbes's days, fairly got the better of the centrifugal forces.

One part of his speculations on what we have called



political statics is especially interesting and important at the present day. He saw clearly, what very few people see even now, that liberty is a negative idea, and that what is usually claimed under that name is not liberty, but dominion. That part of our life as to which the law issues no commands is the province of liberty. The possession of control over others is not liberty at all, but power. Hobbes well observes that the distinction between monarchy and democracy lies, not in the amount of liberty which the subjects enjoy—which is an accidental matter dependent on the quantity of ground (so to speak) covered by the laws at a given time—but in the distribution of power. ‘Subjects,’ he says, ‘have no greater liberty in a popular than in a monarchical state. That which deceives them is the equal participation of command.’ It would tend considerably to clear up various matters connected with the question of extension of the suffrage, if we bore in mind the fact that the question is one, not of liberty, but of the distribution of political power.

Two-thirds of Hobbes’s book are occupied with the subjects of Liberty and Dominion, which he discusses in the systematic fashion of the day, duly adducing Scriptural proofs of most of his doctrines, sometimes at great length. Every article of his version of the laws of nature, for instance, is authenticated in this manner by abundant texts.

The third part of the book is on Religion, and in some ways is the most curious part of the whole. Its

principles, which indeed are the principles of the whole work, are surprisingly similar to those of a great writer of our own times, De Maistre, whose work on the Pope has much in common with Hobbes's work on Government. Starting, however, from the same principles, the two authors arrive at the most opposite conclusions.

Hobbes puts the civil power in the position in which De Maistre puts the Pope, and insists on what in practice amounts to the subordination of the spiritual to the temporal, on grounds very like those on which some of De Maistre's successors have inferred the Pope's right to an indirect authority over all temporal affairs.

In religion, as in all other subjects, Hobbes goes straight to first principles, and examines all his fundamental terms. God's government over men, he says, is founded on the simple fact that God is omnipotent and men weak. God's word is threefold—consisting of reason, revelation, and prophecy, which is a kind of revelation. Reason is the foundation on which government rests. Therefore government rests on God's word. The civil power, therefore, is a kind of middle term between God and man; and, subject to express commands from God, it rests with the civil power to determine the manner in which God shall be worshipped. It also falls to the civil power to regulate and reduce to explicit forms everything which reason teaches in general. Religion is and can be only a supplement to this. What, then, is

the nature of that supplement? In answer to this question, Hobbes enters into one of those obscure and half-scholastic biblical inquiries which he probably introduced for the sake of making his speculations look more orthodox than they really were, and which certainly have the effect of making it exceedingly difficult for a modern reader to understand precisely what he means to say.

There, is, for instance, a strange inquiry into the terms of the contract between God and Abraham, and about the limits of the provinces of Moses and Aaron. To a modern reader all this is by no means edifying. The general drift of the argument, however, is that, under the old dispensation, there was always a positive institution, a definite form of government in the strict sense of the word, which represented God to men.

The chapter on the Christian dispensation is more interesting, though it too is expressed in such a crabbed and unfamiliar way that it is hard to understand it fully. The most remarkable point of it appears to be that, though God is a King, Christ was not sent to govern mankind in the full sense of the word. His main function was advice or counsel, which, as Hobbes with profound truth observes, is continually confounded with law, though the two are radically distinct. •

‘The government whereby Christ rules the faithful ones in this life is not properly a kingdom or dominion, but a pastoral charge or the right of teach-

ing. That is to say, God the Father gave him not a power to judge of *meum* and *tuum* as he doth to the kings of the earth; nor a coercive power nor legislative; but of showing to the world, and teaching them the way and knowledge of salvation—that is to say, of preaching and declaring what they were to do who would enter into the kingdom of heaven.' '

The kingdom of God, under the new dispensation, in the full sense of the word kingdom, 'is heavenly and begins from the day of judgment.' The Christian revelation, he adds, affected not the laws of God, but the sanction of those laws. In instituting the sacraments, Christ gave a law in the strict sense of the word, but it was the only law which he gave. As to, moral duties, in general he gave none. He only showed that morality was a law, and not a mere theory, by revealing the fact that punishments would be inflicted after death for breaches of morality. Besides this, he forgave sins, and entrusted others with the power of doing so. There is another strange chapter on this point, discussing the powers of absolution vested in the clergy in the same singular way in which the rights of Abraham and Moses are discussed.

From this general view of the character of the Christian revelation, and of the divine origin of government, Hobbes proceeds to investigate the relations between the Church and the State. He arrives at much the same conclusion as that of Hooker. The Church and the State are identical.

Church unity consists, he says, in unity of government, not in unity of doctrine.

On the other hand, the fact that the civil power has coercive jurisdiction excludes all other coercion, for coercion by its nature must be exclusive. 'A church' (he says) 'is not one except there be a certain and known, that is to say, a lawful power, by means whereof every man may be obliged to be present in the congregation, either himself in person or by proxy, and that becomes one, and is capable of personal functions by the union of a lawful power of convoking synods and assemblies of Christians, not by uniformity of doctrine. . . . It follows that a city of Christian men and a church is altogether the same thing, of the same men, termed by two names for two causes, for the matter of a city and a church is one, to wit the same Christian men. And the form which consists in a lawful power of assembling them is the same too, for 'tis manifest that every subject is obliged to come thither, whither he is summoned by his city. Now that which is called a city as it is made up of men, the same, as it is made up of Christians, is styled a church.'

In some ways this kind of speculation has gone out of fashion, but it is not the less important, for it is perfectly certain that Hobbes was right in the opinion that government must be in one hand. Somewhere or other there must be a supreme power in politics, just as somewhere or other, in every mechanical system, there must be a centre of gravity. Nor do

the words spiritual and temporal make any real difference. The question is, Who, by any threats, whether of punishment here or damnation hereafter, can secure obedience? Whoever can do this is the supreme ruler, whether he be called Pope or King.

It is very difficult to make out how far Hobbes believed in his own teaching about religion. To go into the matter fully would require an examination of his other works, and a comparison of the different lines of thought by which his mind travelled on different subjects. The work under consideration is full of professions of religious belief, and is very severe upon atheists. It contains, however, passages which, to some persons, suggest an atheistical interpretation, though they closely resemble much that is to be found in the most orthodox of modern defenders of the faith.

Such a passage as the following, for instance, might stand as a summary of much that has of late years been preached with great applause in University pulpits. 'When we say that a thing is infinite, we signify nothing really but the impotency in our own mind, as if we should say that we know not whether or where it is limited. Neither speak they honourably enough of God who say we have an idea of him in our mind, for an idea is our conception, but conception we have none except of a finite thing; nor they who say that he hath parts, or that he is some certain entire thing, which are also attributes of finite things. . . . He, therefore, who would not ascribe any

other titles to God than what reason commands must use such as are either negative, as infinite, eternal, incomprehensible, etc. ; or superlative, as most good, most great, most powerful ; or indefinite, as good, just, strong, Creator, King, and the like—in such sense as not desiring to declare what he is (which were to circumscribe him within the narrow limits of our phantasy), but to confess his own admiration and obedience, which is the property of humility and of a mind yielding all the honour it possibly can do. For reason dictates one name which doth signify the nature of God (*i.e.*) existent, or simply that he is, and one in order to, and in relation to, us—namely, God, under which is contained both King, and Lord, and Father.’

We should not be disposed to consider Hobbes’s religion as mere pretence. The irreligious impression made by his books is rather the consequence of a cold, melancholy, timorous disposition than of disbelief of the doctrines of religion.

## II

### HOBBS'S 'LEVIATHAN' <sup>1</sup>

HOBBS'S treatise on Government contains, in their earliest and stiffest form, his theory of the conditions of stable equilibrium in the body politic. Assuming that all change is to be regarded as an evil, and that permanent tranquillity is the very essence of a political society and the great object for which it exists, he investigates the inferences which are to be drawn from this principle.

The *Leviathan* covers a much wider space. It discusses not merely the principles of government, but those of human nature on which government is founded, as well as those of religion. It also contains, under the quaint title of the 'Kingdom of Darkness,' a treatise on the principal forms of error, which is perhaps the most curious part of the book. The *Leviathan*, in short, is Hobbes's general system, and

<sup>1</sup> *Leviathan; or the Matter and Form of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiastical and Civil.* By Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury. (Vol. III. of Sir William Molesworth's Edition of Hobbes's Works.)



includes the result of all his previous works on politics, human nature, and metaphysics.

It was published when he was sixty-three years old, eleven years after the book upon Government. It is thus one of the ripest, the most complete, and the most perfectly well-written books of the sort in the whole range of literature. Hardly any *magnum opus* of the speculative kind has been so maturely weighed, so completely thought out, and so deliberately fashioned to express in every point the whole mind of its author. For these reasons it is much to be preferred to the earlier works. There is less of that mathematical stiffness about it which makes the work on Government such hard reading; and the liveliness of the style, produced by continual thought and the rejection of everything that on mature consideration appeared superfluous, is wonderful in itself, and carries the reader on with singularly little effort.

There is only one peculiarity about it which gives it an archaic character. This is its quaint wit, which frequently recalls Hobbes's master, Bacon. Take, for instance, the following consolation under the necessary evils of government. 'All men are by nature provided of notable multiplying glasses—that is, their passions and self-love—through which every little payment appeareth a great grievance, but are destitute of those prospective glasses—namely, moral and civil science—to see afar off the miseries which hang over them, and cannot without such payments be avoided.'

The following, though less pleasant, is wonderfully quaint. 'Another infirmity of a commonwealth is . . . the great number of corporations, which are, as it were, so many lesser commonwealths in the bowels of a greater, like worms in the entrails of a natural man. To which may be added the liberty of disputing against absolute power by pretenders to political prudence, which, though bred for the most part in the lees of the people, yet, animated by false doctrines, are perpetually meddling with the fundamental laws, to the molestation of the commonwealth, like the little worms which the physicians call ascarides.'

Hobbes's whole object being to trace out the resemblance of the State to the individual, there is a singular felicity in finding such an unsavoury comparison for the special objects of his animosity.

Apart from its style, and even from its substance, the *Leviathan* has a claim to notice on account of its position in the history of speculation. When it was written, Hobbes had before his eyes hardly any modern authorities who had treated the subject from any other than a scholastic point of view, like Suarez, or from one more or less technically theological, like Hooker and Bellarmine. Bodin and Grotius had indeed handled kindred topics in what may be called a comparatively modern spirit, but, for reasons upon which we cannot now enter, their writings were not likely to be of much use to Hobbes.

Hobbes, however, was pre-eminently the man of his

age. The task of his life was to apply to human nature and to religion the methods which had been devised, not by Bacon only, but by many other persons of equal or superior merit, whose united achievement is symbolised to us in England by Bacon's fame. The distinctive feature of the book is its intensely modern spirit—a spirit which Hobbes no doubt imbibed to a great extent during his long residence on the Continent, and which the peculiar circumstances of his age enabled him to express in England with far greater freedom than was then, or for some time afterwards, accessible in other parts of the world. The book, however, cannot be read with intelligence without perceiving how many spirits in prison there must have been in the first half of the seventeenth century, who utterly rebelled against the religion and philosophy of their time, and especially against the 'Church philosophy,' as Hobbes calls the technical divinity then current.

The *Leviathan* is divided into four parts. The first treats of Man, the second of a Commonwealth, the third of a Christian Commonwealth, and the last of the 'Kingdom of Darkness.' We will try to give such an account as can be given in a reasonable compass of this astonishing work, the greatness of which must grow upon every diligent student of it in proportion to the time which he gives to its study. We hope, in a subsequent article, to notice Hobbes's minor works, and we reserve till then the few observations which we shall think it necessary to add on

the deficiencies of this system. These are more apparent in his reflections on historical facts than in his abstract inquiries.

His first book is on Man, and his style is so firm, so clear, and so beautifully compact that a very good idea of it can be given by extracting and collecting its cardinal propositions. Going to the beginning of things at once, he sets out with an inquiry into the nature of thought. 'Concerning the thoughts of man I will consider them first singly, and afterwards in train or dependence upon one another. Singly they are every one a representation or appearance of some quality or other accident of a body without us, which object worketh on the eyes, ears, and other parts of a man's body; and by diversity of working produceth diversity of appearance. The original of them all is that which we call sense.'

Thoughts thus originate in sense, and raise images. 'After the object is removed or the eye shut we still retain an image of the thing seen, though more obscure than when we see it. . . . This decaying sense when we would express the thing itself, I mean fancy itself, we call imagination . . . but when we would express the decay, and signify that the sense is fading, old, and past, it is called memory.'

So much for thoughts considered singly. As for thoughts considered 'in train or dependence upon one another,' they are of two kinds. In some cases the train of our thoughts is 'unguided, without

design,' yet even then there is a real, though generally an unperceived, connection of ideas. Hobbes illustrates this by the man who, talking of the civil wars, asked the value of a Roman penny—the connecting links being Judas's thirty pieces of silver, and the sale of Charles I. by the Scotch.

Hobbes, we believe, was the first person who attached anything like its true importance to the association of ideas thus exemplified, or who advanced the doctrine which has steadily made its way since his time—though even now it is hardly ever realised to its full extent—that reasoning is only a case of it. This, however, is distinctly his doctrine, for he adds that 'the second' sort of mental discourse 'is more constant, as being regulated by some desire or design.' 'From desire ariseth the thought of some means we have seen produce the like of that which we aim at; and from the thought of that the thought of means to that mean, and so continually till we come to some beginning within our own power.'

This, he says, is common to man and beast; but to reverse the process, 'when, imagining anything whatsoever, we seek all the possible effects that can by it be produced,' is peculiar to man. There is more to be learnt from this observation than from acres of Coleridge's argumentations about reason and understanding. With his wonted terseness Hobbes sums up his psychology in two lines. 'Besides sense and thoughts and the train of thoughts, the mind of man has no other motion.'

From this analysis of thought, which reduces it to systematised imagination, Hobbes passes to the consideration of language, the external symbol of thought. His chapters on this subject appear to us the most remarkable in his whole book. Both the thought and the style are so close and profound that it is impossible to abridge them, but a general notion of them may be given shortly as follows.

Words are the names of mental images which they serve to recall. If, and in so far as, the mental image is clearly discerned, the word which produces it is intelligible, and may be understood, for understanding 'is conception caused by speech.' Of these words many are ambiguous, because the images excited by them in the minds of different men are themselves different. 'One man calleth wisdom what another calleth fear;' 'one cruelty, what another justice,' etc. (This anticipates Bentham's famous distinction about eulogistic and dyslogistic terms.)

Reasoning is the addition or subtraction of words—their combination, that is, in complex images more or less varied according to the words used. 'Reason is nothing but reckoning—that is, adding and subtracting of the consequences of general names,' ascertaining how they modify the mental images which they affect. The great source of error is the use of words which are either insignificant or raise an image not fully representing the thing imagined. 'Words whereby we conceive nothing but the sound, are those we call absurd, insignificant, and nonsense.' Man is the only

animal which reasons, but 'this privilege is alloyed by another, and that is by the privilege of absurdity.' Men alone are misled by fallacies. When we have 'a knowledge of all the consequences of names appertaining to the subject in hand, that is it which men call science.'

Hobbes, upon the whole, conceives of science as a collection of general imaginations as to the ways in which things happen, denoted by words which call them up distinctly, and so as to be apprehended in their application to the causes and effects of particular facts.

Having thus considered man as capable of knowledge, Hobbes passes to the consideration of him as capable of action. Here, again, he sets out with the imagination, which 'is the first internal beginning of all voluntary motion.' Some imaginations being pleasing and others displeasing, the first dispose us to move towards the object imagined, the others from it. Desire and aversion signify our disposition towards an absent object, and love and hate our disposition towards the same object when present. Objects of desire are beautiful, pleasant, or useful, according as we contemplate, enjoy, or seek them; and in the same way objects of aversion are hateful, unpleasant, or obstructive. He resolves all the passions in this way into cases of desire or aversion for particular things, and there is no part of his work in which his genius is more profusely displayed.

A single specimen will show the beauty and force of his thoughts on this subject. '*Love* of one singularly, with desire to be singularly beloved—the PASSION OF LOVE. The same, with fear that the love is not mutual, JEALOUSY.' Was there ever a more perfect or a shorter definition?

Many of these definitions have given much offence; for instance: '*Fear* of power invisible, feigned by the mind or imagined from tales publicly allowed, RELIGION; not allowed, SUPERSTITION. And when the power imagined is truly such as we imagine, TRUE RELIGION.'

The definition, after all, errs only by defect; substitute for '*fear*' '*affections towards*,' and it becomes as nearly true as any such definition can be.

The passions end in action. 'When in the mind of man appetites and aversions, hopes and fears concerning one and the same thing, arise alternately; and divers good and evil consequences of the doing or omitting the thing propounded come successively into our thoughts, so that sometimes we have an appetite to it, sometimes an aversion from it, sometimes hope to be able to do it, sometimes despair or fear to attempt it; the whole sum of desires, aversions, hopes, and fears, continued till the thing be either done or thought impossible, is that we call Deliberation.'

This is the foundation of the famous definition of the Will. 'Will is the last appetite in deliberating.'

This analysis of the passions is followed by an



analysis of the states of mind in which mental discourse may end, such as judgment, doubt, science, opinion, conscience, and faith. His account of conscience is the most remarkable. Conscience, he says, properly means the knowledge by more persons than one of the same fact; and inasmuch as a fact known by several persons must be very sure, it is wrong to speak against it, or persuade others to do so.

‘Afterwards men made use of the same word metaphorically for the knowledge of their own secret facts and secret thoughts. . . . And last of all, men vehemently in love with their own new opinions, though never so absurd, and obstinately bent to maintain them, gave those their opinions also that revered name of conscience, as if they would have it seem unlawful to change or speak against them.’

After some chapters of less importance, Hobbes proceeds to the subject of morals, or, as he prefers to call them, manners, and his treatment of this is the most characteristic part of his book. According to his invariable method he treats the whole question as one of fact, applying himself to determine what in fact is the end of morality, the object of human wishes. It is in relation to this matter that he is led into what is usually considered as his greatest paradox. ‘In the first place I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power that ceaseth only in death.’ In order to understand this, it is necessary to understand what Hobbes meant by power, for he

uses the word in a technical sense, and this fact is generally overlooked. 'The power of a man, to take it universally, is his present means to obtain some future apparent good.'

Elsewhere he says: 'There is no such *finis ultimus*, utmost aim, nor *summum bonum*, greatest good, as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers. Nor can a man any more live whose desires are at an end than he whose senses and imagination are at a stand. Felicity is a continual progress of the desire from one object to another.'

The universal desire of power is only a name for this continual striving. Neither his critics nor Hobbes himself always bear this in mind. So great a writer as Butler appears to have misunderstood him completely on this point, and there are no doubt passages in the *Leviathan* in which the word 'power' is used without reference to the general definition of it just quoted.

Such is Hobbes's conception of men considered as individuals, and he argues from this that their natural state is a state of war, each against all the rest. Inhuman as this sounds, it means no more than that, if all society, all religion, all law, and all morals were taken away, universal anarchy would prevail; for religion, law, morals, and all the other relations of society are, as Hobbes himself teaches, produced by men's sense of the misery of that state of war which would exist without them. The step from the one state to the other in his theory is the perception of

the laws of nature, which he investigates at length, and finally defines as follows.

‘These dictates of reason men used to call by the name of laws, but improperly; for they are but conclusions or theorems, concerning what conduceth to the conservation and defence of themselves; whereas law, properly, is the word of him that by right hath command over others.’

The laws of nature are, according to Hobbes, the terms upon which a compromise between the conflicting desires of different men can practically be made.

From this conception of human nature he proceeds to discuss the nature of the commonwealth, ‘that great Leviathan, or rather, to speak more reverently, that mortal God to which we owe, under the immortal God, our peace and defence.’ I have before described his views on this subject, and it is therefore unnecessary on the present occasion to do more than refer to them in a very summary manner.

The commonwealth, or Leviathan, is with him the ideal sovereign who is, and by the nature of things always must be, the supreme disposer of coercive power. Change its character and form as you will, the thing itself will always remain, just as there will always be a centre of gravity in every mass of matter.

This is the central idea of the whole book, and the rest of it may be considered as little more than an

examination of the ways in which the coercive sanction may be applied. It can, for instance, regulate all conduct. It can regulate the expression of opinion; it can regulate all external processes of education and the like, by which opinion is formed; but, except to this extent, it cannot reach the thoughts of men's hearts. These, indeed, are beyond all coercive authority whatever, even that of God himself.

Hobbes expressly says, in speaking of Revelation: 'We are bidden to captivate our understanding by the words, but by the captivity of our understanding is not meant a submission of the intellectual faculty to the opinion of any other man, but of the will to obedience where obedience is due. For sense, memory, understanding, reason, and opinion are not in our power to change, but always and necessarily such as the things we see, hear, and consider suggest unto us, and therefore are not effects of our will, but our will of them. We then captivate our understanding and reason when we forbear contradiction, when we so speak as by lawful authority we are commanded, and when we live accordingly, which in sum is trust and faith reposed in him that speaketh, though the mind be incapable of any notion at all from the words spoken.'

By this remarkable device Hobbes reconciled the utmost latitude of private opinion with the strongest theories as to sovereign power over opinions. It is obvious, from many other passages, that he not only highly valued this freedom, but wished to see it pro-

tected by what he regarded as, the only sure shield for it, the natural indifference of the civil power to controversies which do not disturb the peace.

After writing the history of the decline of the power of the Popes, the Bishops, and the Presbyterians, he says: 'And so we are reduced to the independency of the primitive Christians to follow Paul, or Cephas, or Apollo, every man as he liketh best; which if it be without contention . . . is perhaps the best.'

After describing at length the conditions of political equilibrium, Hobbes proceeds to consider how they are affected by Christianity. His speculation on this subject is perhaps the most famous part of the whole book. It may be described in a few words as the earliest and one of the most complete specimens of rationalism to be found in literature. The general effect of it is to reduce Christianity to the position of a supernatural sanction to natural morality, without in any way contesting the truth of the Bible, which he assumes to be the exclusive receptacle of the Christian religion.

This is well pointed out by Warburton in a note to Book I. chap. v. of the *Alliance*: 'Hobbes' (he says) 'is commonly supposed to be an enemy to all religion, especially the Christian. But it is observable that in his attacks upon it (if at least he intended his chapter of the Christian Commonwealth, in the *Leviathan*, for an attack) he has taken direct contrary measures to those of Bayle, Collins,

Tyndal, Bolingbroke, and all the other writers against Revelation. They endeavoured to show the Gospel system as unreasonable as their extreme malice could make it, he as reasonable as his admirable wit could represent it.'

It must be recollected that in Hobbes's day, and indeed long afterwards, every one rationalised — Bossuet and Bellarmine as much as Hobbes or Jeremy Taylor. Admit that all truth upon the greatest subjects of human inquiry is somehow or other to be extracted from the Bible, and, whatever may be your system, you will have to treat the Bible in the strangest way before you can 'prove' it. Hobbes adapts the Bible to his general purposes with supreme ingenuity, and a great deal of what he says is quite true, though it ought to be connected with many other truths.

Christianity embarrassed him thus: If God has established a divine society and a divine system of morality, how can the civil ruler be supreme, and how can the rules thus laid down fail to override all human laws? The principal devices by which he avoids this difficulty are the following. He admits that 'it is madness' to obey the civil power at the expense of damnation. What then, he asks, is necessary to salvation? He answers, two things — faith and obedience. Faith that Jesus is the Christ is what all Christian sovereigns admit in various forms, though infidel Powers deny it. Under Christian Powers, therefore, no difficulty arises. Under infidel Powers,

the precedent of Naaman, who bowed down to Rimmon but worshipped the true God in his heart, may safely be followed. As to obedience, Christianity is not a system of laws but of counsels, one of which is to obey the laws to which we are subject, which are the law of nature as interpreted by the sovereign of our country. As to the clergy, they are only advisers, and in no sense rulers. Their only power is that of excommunication, which, when you analyse it, means no more than the power of expressing disapproval.

It is easy to understand how, by the proper use of these principles, and by interpreting the language of the Bible according to his own view, Hobbes was able to give to his whole system an air of orthodoxy to which it is, on the whole, as well entitled as many other systems which have a much more orthodox reputation.

The last book, on the 'Kingdom of Darkness,' is an examination of the various deceptions and superstitions by which men have been ruled. Amongst these Hobbes reckons up the prerogatives of the Pope and his clergy, belief in ghosts and devils, the belief in scholastic philosophy, belief in the doctrine of eternal punishments (he urges nearly all the modified interpretations of the texts on this subject so well known in our day, and protests against the cruelty of the common doctrine), belief in Aristotle's doctrine 'that not men but law governs,' and a variety of other beliefs which he regarded as injurious.

The chapter ends with an elaborate comparison 'of the Papacy with the kingdom of fairies.' There is

not to be found in all English literature a stranger performance than this chapter. The most profound philosophy, the most singular shrewdness, the strangest freaks of grotesque humour, almost prophetic anticipations of the course of subsequent thought, are all connected together by a framework, the conception of which is so quaint, that there is a difficulty in understanding how it came to be written in sober earnest.

To give specimens of these characteristics would swell our article to an unconscionable length ; but the following references may be worth notice. As an instance of profundity, take chapter xlvii., on Scholastic Metaphysics. Passages at pp. 677, 678 of Vol. III. of Sir W. Molesworth's edition afford an admirable specimen of humour, and of anticipation of the course of modern thought. As for shrewdness, at p. 663 there is a passage about the Romish and Pagan ceremonial which anticipates Middleton's famous tract ; and as for grotesqueness, the passage about the kingdom of the fairies (697-700) might have come bodily out of the *Sapientia Veterum* or Fuller.

These few remarks are enough to give a sort of notion of one of the greatest of all books, and the very oddest of all great books in English literature ; but nothing but careful and repeated study of the book itself can give a true conception of its magnitude, or of the richness of the 'admirable wit' which produced it.



### III

#### HOBBS'S MINOR WORKS <sup>1</sup>

WE have already given some account of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, and of his treatise on Government. We now propose to say something of his minor works, and of his general position in literature.

The dates of his long life are as follows : He was born 5th April 1588. He was educated at Magdalen Hall, at Oxford. He was a sort of secretary to Lord Bacon, for the purpose of translating his books into Latin, and he then acted as tutor in the Devonshire family, travelling with his pupils for many years on the Continent. After the Restoration he lived at Chatsworth for many years, and died at Hardwick Hall, on the borders of Nottinghamshire, 4th December 1679, aged ninety-one.

His books were published in the following order :

<sup>1</sup> 1. *A Dialogue between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws of England.*

2. *Behemoth : the History of the Causes of the Civil Wars of England, and of the Counsels and Artifices by which they were carried on from the year 1640 to the year 1660.*

*Translation of Thucydides*, 1628; *De Cive*, 1640; *Human Nature*, 1650; *De Corpore Politico*, 1650; *Leviathan*, 1651; his mathematical and free-will controversies at various times after 1651; *Behemoth*, and the *Dialogue of the Laws of England* (after his death), in 1681.

Till the late Sir William Molesworth collected them, some years ago, there was, we believe, no complete edition of his voluminous writings. They have a sufficiently formidable look, and are calculated to deter any one but a pretty resolute student. On examination, however, this, like many other difficulties, turns out to be considerably less than it seemed at first sight. More than half of the collection is taken up either by mathematical works which no one would now care to read, or by a set of controversies with Bishop Bramhall about free-will and necessity, which are by this time a weariness to all flesh, or by translations of Homer and Thucydides. It is worth while to read half a page or so of the former translation for the sake of its strange grotesqueness and utter want of any sort of similarity to the original; but the latter is very good. It was the first of Hobbes's works, published 'to warn his countrymen against civil wars,' in 1628.

It is, we think, greatly to be regretted that translations of prose classics should be so little esteemed and read, as they are at present. If they were used more freely, they would go far to dispel a superstition which exists about the classics, and would enable even scholars to get a much more correct notion of them

than they usually have. The common notion that a person who cannot read Greek must necessarily be ignorant of Herodotus and Thucydides seems to us foolish. The best scholars seldom read Plutarch in the original; and surely the Vulgate and the English version have given millions of readers a very fair knowledge of the Bible. Of course, when you have to deal with poetry, where the beauty of the thought depends essentially on the sound and arrangement of words, or with philosophy like that of either Aristotle or Plato, much of which is founded on the assumption that every word represents a thing, translations fall indefinitely short of originals; but the account of the plague at Athens, or of the expedition to Syracuse, is pretty much the same in English as it is in Greek.

Perhaps the fact is that the recognition of this would put in too broad a light, the truth that modern histories are much better than ancient ones, even when they are written by men infinitely inferior to the ancient historians. There was a certain sort of truth, notwithstanding the incorrectness of the expression, in Mr. Cobden's famous phrase about the *Times* and 'all the works' of Thucydides. The events recorded in the newspaper are, at all events, incomparably better certified than those which are to be read of in the history.

Whatever may be the merits of Hobbes as a translator, he is perhaps the last writer who ought to be judged by works which are not original, for a more distinctively original man never lived. Of his minor

works, two—*Behemoth* and the *Dialogue of the Laws of England*—are infinitely the best and most characteristic, especially because they relate to matters of fact, and so display the practical application of his theories, and thus enable us to judge of their value.

*Behemoth* is an account of the Civil Wars. Its strange title was probably meant to show that, as the commonwealth is Leviathan—the most wonderful work of God—so a rebellious assemblage is an aggregation of monsters, a work displaying attributes of a different order. It is thrown into the shape of a dialogue, and is, like all its writer's later works, charmingly written. It ought to be far better known than it is; for, so far as we know, it is the only contemporary account which shows us what sceptical men of the world thought of the great contest and of its party cries.

References to persons of this class are not uncommon in the literature of that time—a circumstance which is often overlooked, but which Scott, with his usual sagacity, and, it must be added, with his usual slightness, has commemorated in *Woodstock*. Hobbes's account of the matter is as shrewd, interesting, and imperfect as such a man's account would naturally be.

The Kingdom of England, he says, was an absolute monarchy when the troubles began. There were, 'in every county, so many trained soldiers as would, put together, have made an army of 60,000 men,' and if they had been, 'as they ought,' absolutely at Charles's command, 'the peace and hap-

piness of the kingdom had continued.' 'Very few of the common people cared much for either of the causes, but would have taken any side for pay or plunder;' but they were 'seduced.' The seducers were, first, 'ministers, as they called themselves, of Christ, pretending to have a right from God to govern every one his own parish;' secondly, Papists; thirdly, 'not a few who in the beginning of the troubles were not discovered, but shortly after declared themselves for a liberty in religion;' fourthly, 'an exceeding great number of men of the better sort,' who, having had a classical education, were led to prefer popular government to monarchy; fifthly, the great towns, 'having in admiration the prosperity of the Low Countries after they had revolted from the King of Spain,' and hoping for similar advantages; sixthly, persons in bad circumstances; and, lastly, the people at large 'were so ignorant of their duty as that not one perhaps of ten thousand knew what right any man had to command him, or what necessity there was of king or commonwealth, for which he was to part with his money against his will,' in which state of ignorance they elected as members those who were most averse to the granting of subsidies or other 'public payments.'

After this description of the state of feeling, Hobbes confutes at length the claims of the Papists or Presbyterians to independent authority, and gives a very curious and shrewd historical sketch of the rise and nature of clerical power, of its diminution at the Re-

formation, and of the rise of the Presbyterian system in foreign countries, where assemblies of ministers 'were not a little made use of for want of better statesmen in points of civil government.'

His description of the power and influence of the Puritanical party is singularly interesting. It is probably more or less unjust, as all caricatures are, but it has also probably the justice of a caricature. 'They went abroad preaching in most of the market towns of England, as the preaching friars had formerly done;' 'they so formed their countenance and gesture' 'as that no tragedian in the world could have acted the part of a right godly man better than these did.' 'For the matter of their sermons,' 'they did never, or but lightly, inveigh against the lucrative vices of men of trade or handicraft;' 'they did indeed with great earnestness inveigh often against two sins—carnal lusts and vain swearing; but the common people were thereby inclined to believe that nothing else was sin.' This led up to a resolution to change the form of government from a monarchy to a democracy; and Hobbes, in the true spirit of his age, imputes to the Puritans a distinct design to this effect throughout, and stigmatises them as impious hypocrites for concealing it under 'the cloak of godliness.'

That men should have mixed motives, sympathies of which they are barely conscious themselves, and a very imperfect knowledge of the true character and tendencies of their own views, seems hardly to have suggested itself to Hobbes. Nothing, indeed, is more

characteristic of the difference between our own and earlier ages, than their total want of that power of entering into the views and feelings of others, which in our day is so common as to threaten sometimes, and in some persons, greatly to weaken all moral distinctions whatever.

The Parliament is treated much in the same way as the Presbyterians. A set design to deprive the King of his sovereignty and to introduce democracy is attributed to the Parliamentary leaders. Their claim to control taxation, and to interpret Magna Charta to mean that no taxes should be taken without the consent of Parliament, is described as amounting to such a design. How could the King be sovereign if, when the burden of defending the kingdom is laid upon him, 'he should depend on others for the means of performing it? If he do, they are his sovereigns, not he theirs.'

This point, laboured and presented in a great variety of forms, is the burden of the whole of Hobbes's treatise. He proves to demonstration that the real question at issue was whether the King or the Parliament was to be sovereign in the proper sense of the word, and he makes the very utmost of the logical disadvantage under which the Parliament undoubtedly lay in admitting the King's sovereignty in words, whilst every one of their acts was opposed to it.

This, however, is far less interesting in these days, than the passages which throw light on the public feeling of the time, and the occasional dissertations by

which the subject is elucidated. Hobbes freely admits that there was, practically speaking, no party in favour of absolute power, and that Charles's own partisans served him very coolly. Speaking of the civil war, he says: 'Those which were then likeliest to have their counsel asked in this business were averse to absolute monarchy, as also to absolute democracy or aristocracy, all which governments they esteemed tyranny, and were in love with monarchy, which they used to praise by the name of mixed monarchy, though it were indeed nothing else but pure anarchy.' The people at large were, from the very first, quite as ignorant and prejudiced. 'King, they thought, was but a title of the highest honour, which gentleman, knight, baron, earl, duke, were but steps to ascend to with the help of riches.'

Even Clarendon was not Tory enough for Hobbes. 'Those men whose pens the King most used in these controversies of law and politics were such, if I have not been misinformed, as, having been members of this Parliament, had declaimed against ship-money and other extra Parliamentary taxes as much as any. This state of mind acted so much on the King's army that 'though it did not lessen their endeavour to gain the victory for the King in a battle, when a battle could not be avoided, yet it weakened their endeavour to procure him an absolute victory in the war'; whereas the soldiers on the other side had 'their valour sharpened with malice,' so that the Cavaliers, though equally brave, 'fought not so keenly.'



This is followed by a curious passage about the London apprentices, who, 'for want of experience in the war, would have been fearful enough of death and wounds approaching visibly in glistening swords; but, for want of judgment, scarce thought of such death as comes invisibly in a bullet, and therefore were very hardly to be driven out of the field'—where, by the way, there was no want of 'glistening swords' in the hands of as sturdy and fearless troopers as ever used them, or of 'death approaching visibly.' This surly and ungracious admission of the stubborn courage of which Englishmen of all parties are now so proud, whoever shows it, is the more remarkable, because Hobbes did not consider it a virtue. 'Fortitude,' he says elsewhere, 'is a royal virtue; and though it be necessary in such private men as shall be soldiers, yet for other men, the less they dare, the better it is both for the commonwealth and for themselves.'

The chief digressions in the book relate to the history of the House of Commons, and to the Universities, and the state of knowledge there. As to the former, it would be difficult to find anywhere a more pithy or vigorous outline of the subject, and the second is still more interesting.

The Universities had been to England 'what the wooden horse was to Troy': 'Curious questions in divinity are started in the Universities, and so are all those politic questions concerning the rights of civil and ecclesiastic government; and there they

are furnished with arguments for liberty out of the works of Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, Seneca, and out of the histories of Rome and Greece, for their disputation against the necessary power of their sovereigns. Therefore I despair of any lasting peace among ourselves till the Universities here shall bend and direct their studies to the settling of it—that is, to the teaching of absolute obedience to the laws of the King and to his public edicts under the great seal of England. . . . The core of rebellion . . . are the Universities, which nevertheless are not to be cast away, but to be better disciplined—that is to say, that the politics there taught be made to be, as true politics should be, such as are fit to make men know that it is their duty to obey all laws whatsoever that shall by the authority of the King be enacted, till by the same authority they shall be repealed; such as are fit to make men understand that the civil laws are God's laws, as they that make them are appointed by God to make them; and to make men know that the people and Church are one thing, and have but one head, the King, and that no man has title to govern under him that has it not from him; that the King owes his crown to God only, and to no man, ecclesiastic or other; and that the religion they teach there be a quiet waiting for the coming again of our blessed Saviour, and in the meantime a resolution to obey the King's laws, which are also God's laws; to injure no man, to be in charity with all men, to cherish the poor and sick, and to live

soberly and free from scandal ; without mingling our religion with points of natural philosophy, as freedom of will, incorporeal substance, everlasting nows, ubiquities, hypostases, which the people do not nor ever will care for.'

Here we have the whole gospel of Hobbes, delivered with incomparable energy and terseness, and this must be our excuse for the length of the quotation.

The *Dialogue of the Common Laws* is probably the first attempt ever made in English to criticise the law of the land in anything like a philosophical spirit. The principal subject of criticism is Coke's *Institutes*, and in particular that part of it which relates to crimes. All the detailed criticism is admirable. Some parts of it have not even yet lost their point. For instance, he says : 'In short, it is for a man to distinguish felony into several sorts before he understandeth the general name of felony what it meaneth.' So 'it is not often within the capacity of a jury to distinguish the signification of the different hard names which are given by lawyers to the killing of a man, as murder and felony, which neither the laws nor the makers of the laws have yet defined.'

His general criticism on Coke is admirable, and will do equally well for some other celebrated lawyers : 'I never read weaker reasoning in any matter of the law of England than in Sir Edward Coke's *Institutes*, how well soever he could plead.'

Hobbes exposes in the true way a fallacy which has often been refuted, about the phrase 'malice

aforethought.' 'If two meeting in the street chance to strive who shall go nearest the wall, and there-upon fighting one of them kills the other, I believe verily he that first drew his sword did it of malice forethought, though not long forethought.'

He also notices, as a great fault in the law, 'the want of registering conveyances of land,' and the needless division of courts into courts of law and courts of equity. This last observation, indeed, is part of a wider subject. The following is remarkable as coming from so staunch an upholder of arbitrary power. It forms part of a criticism on Coke's definitions of burglary and arson: 'I like not that any private man should presume to determine whether such or such a fact be done within the words of a statute or not, where it belongs only to a jury of twelve men to declare in their verdict whether the fact laid open before them be burglary, robbery, theft, or other felony.'

There is a long and most interesting account of heresy considered as a crime, which contains, amongst other things, the following singularly neat argument as to the innocence of error: 'Error in its own nature is no sin. For it is impossible for a man to err on purpose; he cannot have an intention to err; and nothing is sin unless there be a sinful intention.'

These are merely illustrations of the shrewdness with which Hobbes applied his mind to a great subject with which he had little technical acquaint-

ance. The general object of the Dialogue is of a very different order of importance. One of the great points of Coke's *Institutes*, and indeed one of the principal objects of their author's whole life, was the glorification of the common law, and the restriction of the royal authority by means of it.

Coke continually assumes that the common law has an independent existence and authority of its own, that it is the perfection of reason, and that the judges, and even the King himself, are subject to it; and in one passage he goes so far as to limit the powers of Parliament itself by the law of nature. Indeed, the whole tendency of his writings is to invest the common law, and that legal reason of which it was, according to him, the embodiment, with a sort of personality and a modified supremacy.

Hobbes replies upon all this in the interests of his own views, with surprising ingenuity, and with a great deal of truth. Not reason, he says, but authority, makes laws. The common law therefore is law, not because it is reasonable, but because it is a command. But whose command is it? Not the command of Parliament, for that makes statute law. Not the command of the judges, for they have not, and do not even claim, legislative authority, though you, Sir Edward Coke, try to get it for them by your theories. It is therefore the command of the King. It is binding, therefore, as it is the King's command, but it is equitable or not as it agrees or disagrees with permanent and universal principles of reason. The

King, therefore, has the power, and it is his duty to God to bring it into accordance with the principles of reason, and this he ought to do without reference to your precedents, 'for if judges were to follow one another's judgments in precedent cases, all the justice in the world would at length depend upon the sentence of a few learned or unlearned men, and have nothing at all to do with the study of reason.' To show you how much of such moulding the law requires, look here, and here, and here, and see what a mess you the judges have made of it, and above all you, Sir Edward Coke, who 'seldom well distinguish when there are two divers names for one and the same thing.'

It is obvious how much colour is lent to this argument by all Coke's phrases about the perfection of reason and the like. Hobbes always pushes the question—Whose reason do you mean? and always, by a process of exhaustion, gets out the result that it must be the reason of the sovereign—that is, that of the King. He thus effectually trumps Coke, and converts the admitted existence of a common law which was not made by Parliament, into by far the most specious argument ever put forward in favour of the absolute power of the King. It would read thus if fully expressed.

1. No one but the sovereign can make laws.
2. Either the King alone, or the King and the two Houses together, is the sovereign of England.
3. There are laws in England, to wit the common

law, which were not made, by the King and the two Houses together.

4. Therefore the common law was made by the King alone.

5. But the common law (witness Sir E. Coke) is the perfection of reason, and it is because it is reason that it is law.

6. But reason must be declared to be such by authority before it can be a law 'living and armed,' *i.e.* a coercive law, as the common law.

7. Therefore the King's declaration that this or that is reasonable, makes it part of the common law.

8. Therefore the King is sovereign to this extent, that he may make anything part of the common law by declaring it to be reasonable.

9. Therefore an Act of Parliament is only a royal grant, which the King can annul or recall, by declaring that he was deceived, or acted unreasonably in granting it.

10. Therefore the King is absolute.

The fallacy here appears to us to lie in the second and fifth propositions, but the second was almost universally admitted in the seventeenth century, and Coke and his school were stopped from denying the fifth.

We will now proceed, in conclusion, to make a few observations on Hobbes's position in literature, and on what appears to us to be the defective side of his doctrine. Of his position as the great progenitor of the school of thought which may be traced through

Locke, in one direction, to Bolingbroke and Voltaire, and in another through Berkeley and Hume to Mr. Mill, we have spoken on another occasion.

This is, however, by no means his only title to fame. There is something of everything in Hobbes. In theology, his Biblical criticism connects him with one of the most active movements of our own time, and his doctrine of the impossibility of knowing the divine nature, and of the negative or merely devotional character of all words applied to God, has the widest application. Its effect may be traced more or less in all modern theology, one of the cardinal questions of which is whether it can be escaped, or what, if it be true, is its legitimate application.

In morals and law Hobbes is the progenitor of Bentham, many of whose most remarkable speculations are developments of Hobbes's thoughts. In logic he was practically, and to a very considerable degree theoretically, the ancestor of Mr. Mill. His theory of human nature, though certainly imperfect, is full of the shrewdest and most profound observation.

Upon all these great subjects Hobbes was, as it seems to us, by far the most powerful thinker of his age, although it was the age, amongst others, of Descartes. There are, however, defects in his writings to which their very profundity, and the immense range of subjects which they embrace, give increased importance. The most obvious of them is his defective estimate of human nature, and especially the degree in which he underrates the power of the social parts



of it. He regards fear of the unseen world, as the origin of religion, and the fear which men feel for each other, as the origin of society.

This, however, when fairly considered, is not so brutal as it looks. A great deal of very sincere humanity is to be found in Hobbes's writings. No one has ever written more vigorously on the virtue of equity. By justice he means law—as he would say, living and armed; but under the name of equity he praises what most people would call justice; and this, when fully analysed, is nothing but systematic benevolence—benevolence having regard to the interests, not of one, but of all. To go on to make equity a result of fear, instead of recognising the indisputable truth that benevolence is one of the original principles of our nature, was, no doubt, bad and perverse psychology, but that is the worst that can be said of it. It may be questioned whether the habit of carrying analysis too far is really more mischievous than the habit of not carrying it far enough.

As to Hobbes's great and characteristic doctrine of absolute sovereignty, it would well deserve much fuller examination than we can give it at present, for it is one of the most interesting and difficult of all moral and political problems. Of Hobbes's solution of it, it is at present enough to say that the *Behemoth* and the *Dialogue of the Laws of England* show conclusively that he had not solved it. The events which culminated in the scene of the 30th of January 1649 proved conclusively that Charles I. was not, in the philosophical

sense, the sovereign of England. Properly considered, these and other similar events have proved that the actual condition of human society is not one of society in Hobbes's sense, but of what, if he had used words with perfect consistency and impartiality, he would have called anarchy, without, however, allowing the word to connote any censure. This conception is as possible as the other. It means no more than that there is amongst men no such thing as a 'great Leviathan,' or 'mortal God,' which can make men in its own image by the exercise of superior force ; and that all men, or bodies of men, that appear from time to time to occupy such a position are subject, in fact, to certain unexpressed penalties, which they will do well to bear continually in mind.

## IV

### SOVEREIGNTY

IN our former notices of Hobbes's works we tried to give an outline of his opinions, both abstract and concrete, but we had not space to discuss at any length his celebrated doctrine of Sovereignty, or to show its relations to more recent political controversies. It is one of the most remarkable doctrines ever propounded, and though it may in these days appear quaint and superannuated in some particulars, it is intimately connected with many of the most important practical controversies of the day.

Hobbes's theory, when translated into the language of our own times, may be thus stated: Human nature is so constituted that, but for the restraints imposed upon it by law, there would be perpetual wars and disputes among men.

But laws can be laws indeed only when they are enforced by superior power, which must be vested in some man or men, for words of themselves have no power.

If more than one man, or one set of men, have the power of making laws in any given society, anarchy will come upon the society, if the different legislators do not agree ; in other words, it will be a society no longer.

Therefore, in every true society there must be one supreme governor, whether in the shape of a man, or of an assembly of men. The commands of this sovereign may be equitable or inequitable—that is, they may, or may not, tend to promote the welfare of the governed ; but they cannot be unlawful, for they are themselves the laws, and the only laws, of the subject society.

If the sovereign is forcibly and successfully resisted, he ceases to be sovereign, and anarchy ensues, for the essence of sovereignty is supreme force.

Hence, if any body politic be so organised that there are in it different bodies, having or claiming to have legislative power, such bodies politic are in a state of dormant anarchy, which will sooner or later pass through a stage of open anarchy, after which the sovereignty will be revested either in a king or in an assembly. Men cannot serve two masters when those masters disagree.

This body of doctrine, extracted from an immense mass of other matter, part of which was of merely transient interest, is Hobbes's great contribution to systematic politics ; and, with certain explanations and additions, it appears to us to be as true and as important as any of the standard doctrines of political

economy, though it is at least equally liable to be misunderstood and misapplied.

We propose, first, to show what it is, and what it is not ; secondly, to show historically its truth, its importance, and its interest in our own days ; and thirdly, to sketch shortly certain additional considerations which must be borne in mind before it can be made of much practical use.

First, then, as to its truth and nature. It is true, like the propositions of mathematics or political economy, in the abstract only. That is to say, the propositions which it states are propositions which are suggested to the imagination by facts, though no facts completely embody and exemplify them. As there is in nature no such thing as a perfect circle, or a completely rigid body, or a mechanical system in which there is no friction, or a state of society in which men act simply with a view to gain, so there is in nature no such thing as an absolute sovereign in Hobbes's sense of the word. But, as the non-existence of the set of things first mentioned, does not prevent both mathematics and political economy from being sciences of the greatest importance in everyday life, so the fact that sovereignty never is absolute in fact, does not diminish the value of Hobbes's speculations. On the contrary, it will be found very difficult to speak pertinently about politics, or to prove theories as to the true relations of law, morals public and private, rights, the nature and value of freedom, and the like, without continual reference to his principles,

whether in the exact form in which he expressed them or in some other.

If, for instance, any one were asked to explain to some person who was altogether ignorant of the subject what in point of fact a nation is, and what in point of fact is meant by rights, liberties, laws, and so forth, would not some such statement as the following be as good a one as he could give? A nation is a collection of human beings living together under the authority of some person, who regulates their conduct in some particulars by laws—that is, by rules of conduct which forbid or command them to do or leave undone certain things under pain of punishment—and who leaves their conduct in other particulars free from any interference. So far as they are commanded to do this or that, they are said to be governed. So far as they are under no commands, they are said to be free. Thus, in general, they are forbidden to hurt each other, but they are free to do what they please so long as they do not hurt each other. When a law protects a man in doing any particular thing by preventing others from interfering with him, he is said to have a right to do it, and they are said to be under an obligation not to interfere with him. Thus a man has a right, in most countries and in most cases, not to be hurt, and it is his duty not to hurt others.

These laws may be so arranged as to promote the general happiness of those who live under them; in which case they are generally described as good

or equitable, because they favour all equally, and consequently give to each the largest possible share of advantages. They may also be so arranged as to produce a great amount of misery; in which case they are bad, and it then becomes the moral duty of the legislator to alter them for the better. But whether they are good or bad, they are still laws, and resistance to them on the part of subjects produces anarchy, and so destroys the whole fabric of government.

It follows from this that governments, as long as they last, are supreme, for only that which is supreme is the government: A legislative power which is controlled by some other power superior to itself is not the real legislator, but only a subordinate; and somewhere or other, whatever intricacy may be introduced in matters of detail, there will be found, in every political system, a person or number of persons who command, and are not commanded, and whose command is law, let that command be what it will. Intricacy and obscurity as to matters of fact may, and often do, make it very difficult to say who the sovereign is; but to imagine a society in which there is no sovereign is to imagine a society which is not a society, but an anarchy. In other words, a society without a sovereign is a phrase without meaning.

Secondly, the importance and continuing interest of the doctrine appear from the whole both of ancient and modern history. In ancient history the matter is comparatively simple, whether we look at the

internal or external affairs of the States whose transactions it records. In every State of which we read, whether Greek, Phœnician, Italian, or Asiatic, there was a sovereign of some sort whose authority was absolute while it lasted. Religions were for the most part local, and no other means of producing a change were available than violent revolutions implying a period of anarchy. As between State and State, the whole history of the Western world is nothing but one continual series of wars, produced by the necessity which was universally felt of arriving at some sort of equilibrium, and ending only when the whole civilised world had fallen under the unquestioned supremacy of Rome.

If Hobbes had had to write an imaginary history of mankind to illustrate his principles, he could not have constructed one better fitted for that purpose, than the history of the foundation and establishment of the Roman Empire. That 'great Leviathan,' that mortal God, the State, was never more unmistakably incarnated than in the Rome of the Cæsars.

It may appear as if the growth of Christianity refuted Hobbes; but, on the contrary, it affords the strongest confirmation of his theory when fully understood. His great Leviathan, or body politic, is essentially mortal. The strong man armed is always liable to be overthrown by a stronger than he, and the struggle may last for an indefinite time. The Christian Church, when its organisation was complete, was simply an illegal society which by



degrees became strong enough to dispossess the society which then existed and to found a different one in its place. The very existence of such a body as the Church proved that the Empire was not sovereign, that a state of anarchy existed, and that the problem who was sovereign was as yet far from being settled.

How, after destroying the Roman Empire, the Church and the lay kingdoms which came into existence effected a sort of compromise as to their respective provinces; how that compromise broke down altogether in some countries, and was modified in others; how the right of the Church to a monopoly of the prerogative of giving advice in religion was invaded by individuals; how the questions, Who is the State? and Who are the clergy? were discussed by arguments and by arms in different countries, and what were the results of the discussion—all these are the great subjects of modern history down to our own days. They have all one great feature in common. All are struggles for power; and in every case the struggle continues, under various shapes and with different turns of fortune, until at last the fact that one party really is stronger than the other, and has got and will be able to keep the upper hand, has been proved by direct experiment.

This truth is universal. It reaches over every department of human affairs, and displays itself in every fact of human history. It may perhaps

be doubted whether in any age of the world it has been more apparent than in our own. Wherever we look, whether at internal or external politics, or at the sphere of opinion, we find that the question of questions is, Who is sovereign? and that compromises and attempts to effect a division of powers can never be permanent.

One or two illustrations of this will be sufficient. It was long supposed that the English Constitution afforded an instance of a balance of powers; but would any intelligent student of our history make such an assertion now? Is it not perfectly clear, and does not all our history prove it, that the theory is, and always has been, completely subordinate to the fact? Our present Government is a democracy in which wealth and social rank have exceptional advantages; and every one concerned not only knows this, but is kept in a continual state of uncertainty and inefficiency by being afraid either to avow it or to act in opposition to it.

The American Constitution, again, was framed most carefully with a view to a scientific distribution of powers between the Confederacy and the States, and between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the Government. The whole document carefully evades the question of sovereignty; yet this question had to be, and was, decided at the expense of one of the most obstinate and bloody civil wars upon record.

The question between the temporal and the

spiritual powers broke out in a variety of forms, and at different times and places, and still occupies a considerable share of attention; but it would not be hard to show, if this were the proper place, that it is susceptible of only two complete solutions, one or the other of which it will most assuredly receive all over the world. Either the whole of human life ought to be regulated by a priesthood, or no priesthood is, as such, more than a body of advisers to whom people can listen or not as they please.

Such is Hobbes's theory, and such the sort of evidence on which it rests. His mistakes arise from the manner in which he applies it to concrete facts. He continually tries, as we have shown elsewhere, to pass from the abstract proposition that sovereigns, as such, are absolute, to the concrete proposition that the King of England is sovereign.

Most assuredly the King of England was not sovereign in the abstract sense, for, if he had been, Charles I. would never have had his head cut off for the way in which he governed the country. The civil wars showed conclusively that the English people did not intend to submit, and were not prepared to submit, to the King, except to a certain very limited extent, and that, if those limits were exceeded, they would soon find ways to repress such excesses. In other words, whatever his title might be, and whatever phrases might be used upon the subject, the King of England was only a magistrate with a limited authority, and not a sovereign in the metaphysical sense of the word.

It is singular that Hobbes, who of all men of his age was most alive to the importance of treating all questions as questions of fact, and of not being led away by phrases, should not have seen that the question of sovereignty is emphatically a question of fact. He is the sovereign who actually is supreme, and by whose consent the laws actually are enforced; not he whom some one or other, at some time or other, has agreed to consider supreme.

The democrats of the eighteenth century appear to have appreciated this truth better than Hobbes, and they embodied it in the famous proposition that the people is sovereign; but this is as much an abstraction, and as far from the real truth, as Hobbes's propositions about the King of England. 'The people' generally means roughly a numerical majority of the adult males for the time being; but suppose that they have no common views, no confidence in each other, no means of communication—suppose, in short, that they are in the position of the native populations of British India—it is surely altogether absurd to say either that they have any will, or that that will, whatever it may be, is sovereign.

The sovereign of India for the time being is the sovereign of England; and who is sovereign of England, in the metaphysical sense of the word, it is impossible to say. There is no such person, and many cases might occur in which the amount of dormant anarchy which exists amongst us would be made manifest to all the world. The divergence between

the state of facts which exists amongst us at the present day, and the abstract notion of a State, is probably greater than it ever was before in any great country, and it is possible that it may one day have to be considerably reduced, by methods, which may not be pleasant to our feelings, or flattering to our national vanity.

It is of the essence of an abstract doctrine, upon whatever subject, to be partial, and to neglect, for the sake of clearness, a number of subordinate considerations, which are necessary to connect it with existing facts.

We will refer to a few of those which bear upon the subject of sovereignty, and which show, incidentally, in what particulars Hobbes fell into the error of drawing false inferences from a theory which, though true as far as it went and surprisingly shrewd, was very incomplete, and stood in need of all sorts of supplementary considerations.

In the first place, Hobbes permits himself to be deceived by what Bentham would have called a dyslogistic phrase, in the horror which he always expresses at anarchy. Anarchy, properly speaking, is not only not necessarily a bad thing, but it may be very good; for anarchy is only the absence of restraint—in other words, it is another name for liberty; and it may be well worth while to leave particular questions undecided, so as to produce what we have called a dormant anarchy, for the purpose of procuring a given result.

So long as the question whether the King or the Parliament was sovereign, was allowed to sleep, their joint power, though no doubt it concealed a potential civil war which at last arrived, was highly beneficent. The American Union would never have been formed at all if the right of the States to secede had not been allowed to remain undecided until the time arrived for its decision by way of direct experiment. The division between the spiritual and temporal powers was a case of anarchy, and was the source of endless contention ; but the pretensions of each party, and the violence of their conflicts, have at length brought them in some parts of the world, and will, it is to be hoped, bring them in every part of the world, into their true relation.

In short, the existence of a great deal of anarchy is a necessary condition towards getting an answer to the question, Who is the sovereign, and how is it wise for him to comport himself towards his subjects ? The struggle between the Church and the State is slowly teaching people throughout the world, that the coercive sanction ought to be exclusively in the hands of the civil power, but that it ought not to be used to prevent the clergy from freely tendering their counsel to all who are disposed to accept it.

In the next place, sovereignty means nothing but supremacy. There are various powers to which men are subject—that is, different persons are able to influence their conduct by the application of a great variety of motives, and, as these differ in force, there

will always be one which is stronger than, and is thus supreme over, the rest. The schoolmaster can flog the pupil, the judge can sentence the schoolmaster, the King and Parliament can punish the judge, and the Pope (we will suppose) can cause them all to be damned. Consequently, the Pope is sovereign. But remove the Pope, and the King and Parliament are sovereign. Apart from them, the judge is sovereign ; and apart from him, the schoolmaster is sovereign over the little boy's desire to lie in bed in the morning. He can, that is, apply the fear of the birch, which is a stronger motive, to overcome the pleasure of lying in bed, which is a weaker.

Hence it is obvious that sovereignty itself is limited by human nature. At its highest estate it represents nothing more than the power of fear raised to the greatest extent to which the particular person acting as a ruler can apply it. In practice, this limitation is of immense importance, as it imposes upon sovereign power limits which are very soon reached in every part of the world, and which, it is the constant tendency of the increase of knowledge and civilisation to make narrower and narrower.

Being a man, or a body of men, the sovereign is always more or less ignorant, weak, and irresolute. He may be deceived, or avoided, or dissuaded from his purpose. Hence his threats are always more or less uncertain. There is always a great chance of impunity, and this diminishes their effect to an incalculable degree. In the last resort, he may even be

successfully resisted by open force or by passive disobedience, and this again puts a limit to his power, not the less real because it is tacit, and because its extent cannot be precisely ascertained.

When all this is put together, it becomes obvious enough that absolute power and sovereign power are much less formidable than they look. For purposes of persuasion sovereign power is no doubt extremely potent. On some subjects, as, for instance, on all that pertains to the relation of the sexes, it sets up its own standard, and is indefinitely influential over vast masses of human beings; but for purposes of threatening it is less powerful than the terms in which it is described might at first lead us to suppose. Indeed, the extent to which people are capable of being affected by threats is by no means indefinitely great. There is a point beyond which you cannot terrify; for, whatever Hobbes might say upon the subject, the mass of mankind are not of opinion that death is the greatest of evils, and they are moreover actuated by a singular propensity to disbelieve in the reality of that which is exceedingly disagreeable. Threaten men beyond a certain point, and they will not believe that the threats will be executed in fact.

This last consideration introduces two others which Hobbes continually overlooks, but which are most necessary to connect his principles with practice. The first is, that the exertion of sovereign power cannot alter human nature, and has no sort of tendency to do so. Let laws be as complicated and



punishments as severe as you please, nothing will ever make that useful to mankind which in point of fact is injurious, or that injurious which in point of fact is useful. To try to do so is like making laws to forbid rain in harvest time. It follows that, if the sovereign makes bad laws, no amount of punishment for breaking them will ever make the laws good, or teach people to regard them as good ; and nothing in the long run will keep people from discussing the question whether continued submission to them is, after all, a greater evil than a period of anarchy, with its chances of a change for the better.

This limitation on sovereign power is the really efficient one, and it is remarkable that, seeming as it does so simple to us, it should not have occurred to one of the greatest thinkers and most perspicuous writers of his age. Probably Hobbes was so much frightened and disgusted by the excesses of the civil wars that he could not bear to admit the possibility that any disease could be worse than such a remedy. It is certain that he greatly underrated the evils which tyranny may inflict on a people. He says, for instance, that the power of arbitrary taxation assumed by Charles I. was, after all, a small matter, as it had never been used except to enrich some favourite, which was of little importance to the nation at large. The evils which the folly and wickedness of Louis XIV. and Louis XV. inflicted upon France and Europe, and the intolerable grievances which bad financial legislation may inflict upon millions, in regard

to the comfort of their daily existence, are matters about which, in the present day, there cannot be two opinions.

The second of the considerations in question is that, as Paine observed, society and government are totally different things. Even if all laws were to be abolished together, society would not cease to exist. Men would then live together in a much less comfortable manner, it is true, than at present, but still they would carry on the main affairs of life. The number of actions in which any particular individual is in any degree restrained by law is almost infinitesimally small. The social desires are, after all, much stronger and much commoner than those which are anti-social. In a great majority of cases contracts would be kept, truth would be spoken, people would abstain from hurting each other, even if there were no laws at all, and if the exercise of private vengeance were the only coercive sanction which men had to dread. Society is the work of law in some proportion, but in a much greater proportion it is the work of very different agents—love of companionship, curiosity, the desire of all sorts of advantages which are to be derived from mutual assistance founded on mutual goodwill. If such qualities did not exist, and were not exceedingly powerful elements in human nature, it is difficult to see how societies could ever have been formed in the world at all.

The general result is, that Hobbes's doctrine of sovereignty is true if its abstract character is carefully

remembered, if it is separated from the concrete consequences which he connected with it, and if it is explained by, and connected with, other principles of which he appears to have been almost entirely ignorant. These qualifications may appear to go far to destroy the degree of credit to which he is entitled for his speculations ; but the great misfortune of premature system-making is that the qualifications necessary to apply particular principles to facts are generally omitted, and little more can be expected of those who attempt a work so gigantic as that of Hobbes, than that they should get a strong and clear hold of important truths which others had overlooked. To this praise Hobbes is certainly entitled, though he is at least equally exposed to the corresponding censure.

## V

### BOSSUET'S EDUCATION OF THE DAUPHIN<sup>1</sup>

THERE are books which owe their value neither to the positions which they establish nor to the information which they contain, but to the completeness and vigour, and possibly to the beauty, with which they represent a particular view of some subject of general and lasting importance. To do this in such a way as to command the attention of the world for a great length of time is the greatest of all literary exploits. A mere discovery has about it something of the nature of a happy accident. Ordinary qualities, united with a laborious disposition, will enable a commonplace man to write an instructive and useful book ; but no one except a great man can succeed in uniting into one harmonious whole various lines of thought and study, so as to make his facts and his thoughts illustrate and support each other, to show the essential unity of views which at first sight appear

<sup>1</sup> 1. *De la Connaissance de Dieu et de Soi-même.* 2. *Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle.* 3. *Politique tirée de l'Ecriture Sainte.*

to relate to different subjects, and to arrest the attention and express the convictions of a considerable section of mankind. A work which rises to such a level throws, for all future times, a light upon the age in which it was written which scarcely anything else can give.

Hardly any one ever performed this feat more impressively than Bossuet in the three books now before us. Collectively, they may be said to express the high Tory theory of life — absolutism — in its flower and perfection. For nearly two hundred years the tide has flowed in a diametrically opposite direction. A few men of genius, gravitating like De Maistre towards mysticism, or recoiling like Dr. Newman from scepticism, have, for more or less eloquent reasons, attempted to stem the general current, and to think as men thought at a different stage of the world's history, but they have made no deep or lasting impression. They are forced to admit that they exercise no real influence on the course of affairs, and express no view of them which is unconsciously held by any considerable number of disciples. By looking back for a time to the teaching of their great predecessors, we learn to see the real value of their theories, and to understand under what conditions of life and knowledge men really could believe what they, after all, only try to believe.

If it were the order of nature that God should be represented upon earth by infallible<sup>e</sup> priests and irre-

sponsible kings, it would be impossible to imagine a nobler system of education for a great king than that which Bossuet conceived, or a teacher better suited to carry it out than Bossuet himself. No one can read his letters to Innocent XI. *de institutione Delphini* without a strange mixture of respect for the teacher's intense earnestness, magnificent vigour, and immovable self-confidence—pity for the unfortunate pupil who was subjected to a pressure which no human being could be expected to endure—and wonder at the splendid falsehood of the whole course of instruction. No castle in the air was ever more magnificent, or less solid in its foundations, than that which Bossuet builds up in these memorable books with the most perfect confidence in its stability. Certain parts of his teaching, no doubt, are sound and true, and all are expressed with incomparable majesty of style and thought; but, viewed as a whole, and in their mutual relations and connections, his opinions have, by the mere force of time and facts, become altogether incredible and untenable on the terms on which he held them.

The drift of the whole course of study might be thus expressed. Thus ought a King of France, the first of mankind, to think of man and his destiny, and to rule the noblest branch of the human race. This general subject is arranged under three great heads: The knowledge of God and man in general; the knowledge of the dealings of God with man in fact, as displayed in universal history; the knowledge of

the laws given by God to man for his guidance in political life. The treatise *De la Connaissance de Dieu et de Soi-même*, seems to have been the first of the three works, both in the date of its composition, and in the scheme of education to which the Dauphin was submitted.

Its purport is thus summed up by Bossuet himself in his letter to Innocent XI. : 'Nous expliquons la structure du corps, et la nature de l'esprit, par les choses que chacun expérimente en soi ; et faisons voir qu'un homme qui sait se rendre présent à lui-même trouve Dieu plus présent que toute autre chose, puisque sans lui il n'auroit ni mouvement, ni esprit, ni vie, ni raison, selon cette parole vraiment philosophique de l'apostole prêchant à Athènes.'

The book is divided into five chapters, treating respectively of the soul, the body, the union between them, God their Creator, and the difference between men and animals. Its most characteristic feature is its extreme and unflinching dogmatism. It never occurs to Bossuet that any conclusion but one can be reasonable, and that conclusion is, of course, the essence of orthodoxy. Strange, however, as the expression may appear, Bossuet was a thoroughgoing rationalist. He says: 'The understanding (*l'entendement*) is the light which God has given us for our guidance. It has different names ; in its inventive and penetrating capacity it is called spirit (*esprit*) ; in so far as it judges and directs to truth and goodness, it is called reason and judgment. Reason, in so far

as it turns us from the true evil of man, which is sin, is called conscience.'

He adds elsewhere that, unless it is seduced by passion, reason is infallible. Error, he says, is caused by haste, pride, impatience, and sloth, and he adds: 'It is certain that reason, when purged of these vices, and truly attentive to its object, will never err, because then it will either see clearly, and what it sees will be true, or it will not see clearly, and then it will be certain that it ought to doubt till light appears. . . . The understanding is never forced to err, and never does err except for want of attention; and if it judges wrong by following the senses or the passions derived from them too readily, it will correct its judgment if a right will makes it attentive to its object and to itself.'

The object of reason is truth, eternal and immutable. This is asserted with characteristic emphasis and courage in a passage which shortly sums up the drift of the whole book, in these words: 'If everything done by the rule of proportions—that is to say, if all natural objects except myself were destroyed, these rules would survive in my thoughts, and I should clearly see that they would always be good and always be true, even if I myself were destroyed, and if no one were left capable of understanding them. If now I inquire where and in what subject they subsist eternal and immutable, as they are, I am forced to admit a being where truth subsists eternally and is always understood; and this being



must be the truth itself, and nothing but truth, and it is from it that truth flows to all existing objects external to it. It is, then, in this being, in a manner to me incomprehensible, still it is in this being that I see these eternal truths, and to see them is to turn to him who is unchangeably true, and to receive his light. This eternal object is God, eternally subsisting, eternally true, eternally the truth itself.'

Farther on, he says that these eternal truths, which are always the same to every mind, and which themselves regulate the understanding, '*sont quelque chose de Dieu, ou plutôt sont Dieu même.*'

These passages contain the main propositions of the whole treatise, part of which consists of an anatomical description of the more important organs of the body, and another part of a speculation on the way in which the soul acts on the nerves, and so on the muscles and limbs.

The only difficulty which Bossuet appears to have felt at all seriously was that which is derived from the animal creation. If animals have will and reason, and if God and eternal truth are the proper objects of reason, why do they not believe in God and eternal truth, and why are they not moral agents? He labours greatly to answer this difficulty, and though he does not go quite so far as Descartes (whose influence on his mind is everywhere apparent) in making the beasts mere machines, he goes a long way in that direction. He will hardly allow them even sensation, and he utterly denies that an animal

can, in any proper sense, of the word, be educated. Their training is a mere mechanical process. 'A man who trains a dog gives him a piece of bread, takes a stick in his hand, drives (*enfonce*) material objects (so to speak) into every organ, and teaches him by blows of a stick as you forge iron with blows of a hammer.'

It is well worthy of observation that the *a priori* theory of human knowledge and of the human soul always leads to these coarse and ignorant views of the nature of animals. As to the arguments on which the theory itself is based, it is probably true that some minds are satisfied by it, but to the great bulk of mankind, it will always appear to amount to nothing more than a passionate assertion of the truth of a preconceived opinion, thrown into an ostensibly argumentative and philosophical shape. It probably never convinced any one who was not convinced before, or silenced any one who was not prevented either by legal or social penalties from speaking his mind. We refer to those arguments here not for the sake of discussion, but in order to point out their relation to other parts of Bossuet's teaching of more immediate practical importance.

The principle that the mind not only can attain to a direct transcendental knowledge of these divine and eternal truths, but that the power of doing so is the specific quality by which man is distinguished from the brutes, affords an appropriate introduction to the doctrine of the *Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle*, the

first great attempt ever made to view the whole course of history as a whole, traversed and sustained by one great design.

From our own reflections we learn that there is a God possessed of certain attributes and ruling over the world. Though this being has chosen to leave us free, he has secret ways of controlling and disposing of our free will in such a manner as to work out his designs (this is the principal lesson of the separate dissertation called the *Traité du Libre Arbitre*). The history of the world must, and does, show specifically how he has directed human affairs, and what is their great general lesson. It would be hard to mention any book which shows more magnificent qualities than this, the sublime audacity of its conception being perhaps the most striking of them all. It is an apotheosis of authority in all its forms. Its great lesson is that, from the beginning of the world to the time at which Bossuet wrote, there had been one great succession of awful and venerable institutions, ecclesiastical and civil, which were the representatives of God to men.

One of the most characteristic passages is in these words: 'Quelle consolation aux enfants de Dieu! mais quelle conviction de la vérité, quand ils voient que d'Innocent XI., qui remplit aujourd'hui si dignement le premier siège de l'Église on remonte sans interruption jusqu'à Saint Pierre, établi par Jésus Christ prince des Apôtres, d'où en reprenant les pontifes qui ont servi sous la loi on va jusqu'à Aaron et jusqu'à

Moïse ; de là jusqu'aux patriarches et jusqu'à l'origine du monde ! quelle suite, quelle tradition, quel enseignement merveilleux !''

The most prominent object in the book is, of course, the establishment and growth of religion, which he views as the great central event of human history to which everything conduces, and from which everything derives its importance. The vigour and unhesitating conviction with which this is put forward is certainly more impressive than convincing.

Voltaire observed with truth that, in order to produce the desired effect, Bossuet was obliged to give to the history of the Jews a degree of prominence out of all proportion to that which really belonged to it. Voltaire himself may have fallen into the opposite fault, but it is certainly true that Bossuet so managed his argument as to make not merely the substantial truth, but almost the verbal accuracy, of the whole Mosaic history vitally essential to his cause.

When he wrote, the questions to which so much attention has been directed in the course of the last few years by Bishop Colenso, were just beginning to be agitated, and had been very lately handled in a heterodox direction by Spinoza and Simon. Bossuet's indignation and contempt against such speculations knew no bounds. He declared that to doubt that Moses wrote the Pentateuch was to destroy the foundation of his whole theory. 'Les dates,' he says, 'font tout en cette matière,' and he seems to have regarded all such criticism as a mere effort of wickedness,

determined on destroying the Bible on account of the check which it lays upon human passion.

The vehemence with which Bossuet undertook the defence of particular facts which he considered necessary to his creed was the weak side of his mind. He will allow nothing to be doubtful. Prophecy, in particular, he seems to have considered the strongest and clearest kind of evidence in his favour. He says, in relation to fulfilled prophecies: '*Quatre ou cinq faits authentiques, et plus clairs que la lumière du soleil, font voir notre religion aussi ancienne que le monde.*' Even the primacy of St. Peter, and the fact that the Popes were his successors, cannot, he thinks, be doubted in good faith: '*J'avance hardiment ces faits, et même le dernier comme constant, parcequ'il ne peut jamais être contesté de bonne foi,*' etc. Over and over again he triumphs in the '*faits positifs*' on which his own creed stands, and challenges those who impugn it to produce the like. In a word, he is throughout triumphant, audacious, certain of his facts, and utterly contemptuous towards his antagonists.

Flushed with this triumphant establishment of his fundamental theories, he proceeds, in chapters which form a lasting title to fame, to describe the lay part of history. He describes, with wonderful vigour, and with a power of style which has probably never been surpassed, the manners, the laws, the institutions, and the national characteristics of the great nations of antiquity.

Perhaps the most remarkable point in these chapters

is their extreme generality. Bossuet hardly mentions individual men or isolated facts, except by way of allusion and illustration. He enters into hardly any details, but contents himself with a broad general outline, of which it would be difficult to find any other example at that period. On the great temporal Empires themselves which he passes in review, he looks in a light different from, but kindred to, that in which he had viewed the Church. They were venerable for other causes, as the great divine machinery for the temporal government of the world, and as the principal theatres on which Divine Providence displayed itself. The heading of the first chapter of the lay part of the book is highly significant—‘*Les Révolutions des Empires sont réglées par la Providence et servent à humilier les Princes.*’

All of them, however, were earthly and corruptible, and derived their importance from the degree in which they favoured or hindered the chief design of Providence and the one great divine institution—namely, the Church: ‘Thus, when you see passing before your eyes, I do not say kings and emperors, but the great empires which made the universe tremble—when you see the earlier and later Assyrians, the Medes, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans, present themselves before you in succession, and fall, so to say, one upon another—this dreadful crash makes you feel that there is nothing solid amongst men, and that inconstancy and agitation are the proper lot of human affairs.’

The concluding words of the book are to the same effect: 'As you see them fall of themselves, whilst religion sustains itself by its own force, you will easily see where solid grandeur is, and where a man of sense will put his trust.'

Certainly that conception of human history which sets before us one perfect and immutable society, infallible and incorruptible, in the midst of the wreck of all human institutions, is impressive in itself; but Bossuet makes it far more impressive, by connecting it with an explanation of the principles by which these worldly and transient societies ought to be governed.

The *Politique tirée de l'Ecriture Sainte* forms a natural conclusion to the two other works noticed above. In form, it is a kind of cento of passages of the Bible, especially of the Old Testament, bearing more or less on political duties. In substance, it is a vindication of the highest doctrines of absolutism. The general object of human life is to love God, and to love men because they are made in the image of God. No man is a stranger to, or independent of, any other man, and hence men are associated together in nations and otherwise. Government is essential to civil society, and laws or express general rules are essential to constant and uniform government. Law is, in Bossuet's eyes, something divine and mysterious: 'Laws are founded on the first of all laws, that of nature—that is to say, right reason and natural equity. . . . Law is sacred and inviolable. . . . All those

who have spoken well on the subject regard law in its origin as an agreement and solemn treaty by which men agree by the authority of princes on what is necessary to form their society. . . . This does not mean that the authority of laws depends on the consent and acquiescence of the people, but only that the prince, who also by his character has no other interest than that of the public, is assisted by the wisest minds of the nation and supported by the experience of past ages. . . . Law is considered to have a divine origin. The agreement spoken of has a double effect. It unites the people to God and also to each other. . . . There are fundamental laws which cannot be changed.'

This general conception of law as something good in itself, beyond the power of those who make it, and specially authorised by God, naturally leads to a similar conception of authority in general. God is the true king. All governments, whatever may be their form, represent divine authority; but of all forms of government 'monarchy is the most common, the most ancient, and the most natural.' Hereditary monarchy is the best of monarchies, and hereditary monarchy from which women are excluded is the best of hereditary monarchies. Hence follows a conclusion, which to us reads like a bathos, though Bossuet no doubt viewed it as a splendid climax: 'Thus France, where the succession is regulated by these principles, may boast of having the best possible political constitution, and the one most in conformity with that which God himself has established; which shows both



the wisdom of our ancestors and the peculiar protection of God for this kingdom ;' and also, we may add, the degree in which Bossuet can be considered as a trustworthy guide.

Royal authority thus established is sacred, for the king is God's agent. It is paternal, for the king is bound in conscience to promote the happiness of his people. But, on the other hand, it is absolute. No one can coerce the prince, let him do what he will. 'The persons of kings are sacred, and to attack them is sacrilege.' Absolute government, however, is not arbitrary. The king is bound in conscience to obey the laws and to rule according to their prescriptions. Bossuet enlarges at length, and with great sagacity and good feeling, on the duties imposed on a good prince by his position, and on the means by which he may be guided so as to perform those duties aright ; but whatever the practical value of this part of his work may have been to his pupil, its speculative interest is at present inconsiderable.

Such are the main propositions of these three remarkable works, and such the general view of human affairs and human life which they presented to a pupil whom his teacher, not unnaturally, believed to be destined to occupy the first place, after the Pope, amongst mankind. The incompleteness and unavoidable condensation of this sketch make it impossible to give any notion of the majesty and the massive vigour of style and thought with which these great lessons are taught. All the praise given to

Bossuet's style is deserved. He must certainly be pronounced one of the most powerful of modern writers. It must, however, be admitted that his power of style and confidence of assertion greatly outrun his power of thought.

Let us look for a moment at the chief results of Bossuet's system taken as a whole. They may be summed up thus: Reason is the distinctive quality of man, and it leads him to absolute truth—above all, to belief in God. History shows that, for the government of the human race, God has established a vast spiritual corporation as ancient as the world itself, infallible, incorruptible, and everlasting. He has also established many temporal governments with different institutions—that of France, which is an absolute monarchy regulated by law, being the most glorious and perfect. These governments between them prescribe to men their duties, and provide them with a sphere in which to discharge them.

This conception of life in general is like a landscape taken from one particular point of view. So long as you choose to stand still at that particular spot and look in one direction, things may appear to be of that particular shape. Move a few yards in one direction or another, turn your head on one side, and the whole scene is changed.

To men trained in modern habits of thought, and accustomed to care for words only in so far as they represent things, the *Traité de la Connaissance de Dieu et de Soi-même* will seem to be an attempt to arrive at

the knowledge of facts by juggling with words. The *Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle* will appear to owe its unity to the fact that its author was altogether ignorant of modern science, and scornfully refused to notice even what he might have learnt from the criticism of his own day. And the *Politique tirée de l'Ecriture Sainte* will wear the appearance of a collection of mottoes put together to illustrate preconceived opinions which never were true, and which the history of the last two centuries has utterly refuted.

In short, to us this apotheosis of authority in Church and State, and in the very mind itself, is like a dissolving view. It shows us what sort of gorgeous palaces and cloud-capt towers a man of genius could suppose himself to see in human history two hundred years ago.

Of the three books referred to, the *Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle* is by far the most important. It was the first great attempt to separate the wheat of history from the chaff, and to convert it from a subject for pedants into the most practical and interesting of all intellectual studies. Voltaire's *Essai sur les Mœurs* is the book with which it is most natural to compare it. There are, of course, points on which Voltaire is greatly inferior to Bossuet, and there are matters in connection with which his prejudices lead him quite as far wrong, though in a different direction. But if any one will carefully read Voltaire and Bossuet, and compare their general views with the subsequent discoveries of science and criticism, he will probably

conclude that, with all his faults, Voltaire was on the right road and Bossuet on the wrong one—unless, indeed, all modern discoveries in criticism and physical science are mere delusions, and all modern improvements in law, in government, and in politics are changes for the worse, based on wrong principles.

A not less instructive lesson to be learnt from Bossuet is the change of tone which has come over the advocates of views analogous to his. Reason, Dr. Newman tells us, has been in fact—whatever it ought to have been by right—the enemy of religion. He goes to the very brink of the assertion that atheists have the best of the fundamental controversy of religion. With Bossuet, the truth of religion in general, and of his own view of it in particular, is so evident that it cannot be denied in good faith, and may be called the essence of reason. Talk as we may about reason and faith, no one really begins to depreciate reason till he suspects strongly that it means to give judgment against him. Every one gets as much of it on his own side as he possibly can.

## VI

### BOSSUET AND THE PROTESTANTS<sup>1</sup>

AN eminent modern French historian describes Bossuet's defence of all established beliefs and institutions as one of the great spectacles of the seventeenth century. This is perfectly true. It would probably be difficult to find in the history of literature a career so pre-eminently deserving the name of glorious as Bossuet's. Glory was, we do not say the great object, but certainly the great result, of his whole life.

He stands, at the close of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century (born 27th September 1627, died 11th April 1704), as the expounder of a magnificent scheme of all things human and divine, in which religion, politics, law, morals, history, and science each occupy their appropriate place, and are each represented by their properly constituted authority, discharging its part without

<sup>1</sup> 1. *Exposition de la Doctrine Catholique*. 2. *Histoire des Variations des Églises Protestantes*. 3. *Sixième Avertissement aux Protestants*.

interfering with the functions of the others. Pope, kings, clergy, statesmen, generals, men of letters and of science, all fit into the places which have been assigned to them by God himself. The foundation-stone of the whole edifice is a body of revealed truth, embracing all the principal doctrines essential to be known, and expounded and interpreted, from time to time, by a vast organisation extending over the entire world, and lasting through all time. The superstructure has been raised by a long series of struggles, in which divine truth has finally won the victory, and has created a world in its own likeness.

It would be impossible for the human mind to conceive a grander vision, if it were only true; and it must be owned that, if such a state of things did exist, and were to be described by any single person, Bossuet would be that person. No one was ever better fitted to describe magnificent institutions in magnificent language, or to find sonorous and ingenious reasons for believing in the truth of any splendid scheme.

But was it all true? Was the world really organised in this superlative manner? Were Louis XIV. and his institutions, on the one hand, and the Popes and the Councils and the Church theology on the other, the visible representatives of God upon earth, and the depositaries of a divine authority which it was blasphemous to question, and impious to resist? With all his heart Bossuet answered, Yes. Authority

of every kind, in Church and State, was the representative of God and the messenger of God to man. The enemies of authority, vice and crime in all their shapes, and emphatically and above all the vice and crime of disobedience in thought, word, or deed, were the offspring of an abuse of freedom, and were the direct result, or rather were so many particular illustrations, of the original crime of the first man, and of the guilt, in the proper sense of the word, which all his descendants had inherited from him.

Bossuet appears to have conceived of the world as a scene in which authority, arrayed in splendour of every kind, moral, spiritual, and material, was continually engaged in enforcing obedience upon rebels. His strong sense of the divine nature of authority, and his equally strong sense of the extreme wickedness of men, complete each other, and, when taken together, form a conception of the world which is full of gloomy magnificence. With such a starting-point it is by no means surprising that Bossuet should have regarded Protestantism with the most intense aversion, spiritual and intellectual. There was nothing in him which was not offended to the utmost by its fundamental principles. He hated its origin in an independent exertion of the human reason, he hated its ideal of morality, he hated its application to politics, he felt clearly that between his principles and its principles, when fully carried out and developed to their inevitable consequences, there must be a war of extermination, and he accordingly dedi-

cated a great part of his life to the attempt to confound and silence its partisans.

His writings upon this subject fill a considerable proportion of his collected works, but the most memorable of them are not very voluminous. We may take by way of illustration the *Exposition of the Catholic Doctrine*, the *History of the Variations of the Protestant Churches*, and the controversial writings of which the *History of the Variations* was the occasion. The most remarkable of these last is the *Sixième Avertissement aux Protestants*, which sums up in a short compass the gist of the whole of his argument. The occasional importance of these books was very great. They were the great intellectual battery directed against Protestantism in France, and the *Exposition* prepared the way to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, by converting many of the leading Protestants of that time, and in particular Turenne. Gibbon, in a later generation, was converted by the *History of the Variations*, and his case is a typical one, as it shows, in the neatest way, what is the true inference to be drawn from Bossuet's arguments—arguments which in a slightly different form are, and always will be, the most popular and specious plea which can be advanced in favour of the Roman Catholic Church.

The books themselves are essentially popular. They are arguments addressed to men of the world, by a man of consummate ability, though not, as competent critics say, of equal learning; and they have



the same sort of merits that belong to the English apologetic writers against the Deists. Bossuet is by no means unlike a Roman Catholic Paley. He begins by stating with transparent clearness what he means to prove, and he then proceeds to argue in favour of his different propositions with a degree of life, vigour, and ability which it would be scarcely possible to overrate. It may reasonably be doubted whether, in the matter of style, any one has ever surpassed him.

His plan, however, is exceedingly simple, and his art may be practised by almost any one who has sufficient courage, for, after all, the effectiveness of his style depends more on his moral, than on his intellectual characteristics. He is not, for instance, more vigorous than Chillingworth, or than Voltaire. His whole art consists in being singleminded and thoroughgoing. A man who thinks with perfect simplicity, and faces his thoughts in his own mind with unflinching courage, is sure to be consistent and thoroughgoing, and thus to gain real, or at all events apparent, triumphs over persons who may have a firmer hold of the truth than himself, but who embrace it with less energy and simplicity than that with which he embraces error.

The order of the publication of the books we have mentioned is as follows: The *Exposition of the Catholic Doctrine* was published in 1671; the *History of the Variations* in 1688; the *Sixième Avertissement* in 1691. The Exposition, which was the occasion or the excuse of the conversion of Turenne and many others,

is very short, not filling more than sixty or seventy octavo pages. Its object is to put the Roman Catholic system in as reasonable a light as possible, and to show that, whilst it retains all the essentials of Christianity, its distinctive features are not unreasonable when duly understood, and regarded as they are explained by the Council of Trent.

Historically, the Exposition was a bridge of gold for a retreating enemy. Theoretically, like the whole of Bossuet's writings on that subject, it is open to the objection that it answers only one set of difficulties, whilst it leaves a much more formidable set unanswered. To a layman who assumes all the premisses of technical theology to be true, and who is willing to recognise the methods employed in theological controversy as appropriate, the Exposition is no doubt a powerful argument. No one can, of course, affect to deny that the general outline of Christianity is common to all, or almost all, the bodies which call themselves Christian. In Bossuet's time the Socinians—a very small and, except in Poland and a few other places, an illegal sect—were the only body of professed Christians who would not have accepted the Nicene Creed. It is easy to show that the same sort of arguments which may be used in support of that creed, and the same kind of assumptions which are implied in a thorough submission to it, may be urged with a good deal of plausibility in favour of transubstantiation as against consubstantiation.

It is easy, too, to show that the official theories of

the Council of Trent about the invocation of saints, and the respect paid to images and relics, do not deserve the hard names applied by zealous Protestants to the practices founded upon them. So, too, the theory which Bossuet uses to justify indulgences is by no means unlike theories as to merit and satisfaction which may be heard from Protestant pulpits.

With regard to the authority of the Church, the conduct of the different Protestant synods gave him an excellent opportunity of saying that, after all, the question was only as to a choice of masters; and as to the authority of the Pope, he states it so very mildly that it almost drops out of sight. His whole doctrine on the subject is comprised in the following short passage: 'The Son of God having willed that his Church should be one, and solidly founded on unity, has established and instituted the primacy of St. Peter to keep and cement it. For this reason we acknowledge this same primacy in the successors of the Prince of the Apostles, to whom are therefore due the submission and obedience which the Holy Councils and Holy Fathers have always taught to all the faithful. . . . As to the matters on which, as we know, they dispute in the schools, though the ministers continually allege them to render this power odious, it is unnecessary to speak of them here, because they are not of the Catholic faith. It is enough to recognise a chief established by God to conduct the flock in his ways, which those who love brotherly concord

and ecclesiastical unanimity will always readily do.'

This view puts the Pope's authority so low, and qualifies it so largely, by restricting it to that amount of submission which the Holy Councils and Holy Fathers have always taught to all the faithful, that it is consistent with attributing to the Pope little more than an honorary presidency over the Christian world.

Thus the result of the whole tract is to exhibit the Roman Catholic system in the most attractive light to those who are naturally disposed to believe in, and to like, ecclesiastical systems. Bossuet says, in substance, 'You cannot honestly deny that our system is Christian, and you perceive that the parts of it to which you object are really very like parts of your own system, and have been considerably misunderstood by your most popular writers.' The effect of this was as great as it might have been expected to be in an age in which people were growing tired, on the one hand, of theological methods and scholastic disputes, whilst, on the other, they were by no means prepared to apply to theology the methods of inquiry which they had been devising for the treatment of other subjects.

Under such circumstances, nothing can be more seductive than the suggestions that spiritual guides are indispensable; that, when properly understood, the Roman Catholic system is more self-consistent than Protestantism, and not more unreasonable; and,

indeed, that Protestantism is not a system at all, but a common name for many discordant sects, whose debates will infallibly end in universal disbelief unless the Romish authority averts such a calamity.

The Exposition enforces the first part of this case in the manner which we have already described. The *History of the Variations* deals with the second. It is a book which, in the present day, may be read pretty quickly, as the greater part of it is filled by the history of technical disputes between the Lutherans, the Calvinists, and the Zuinglians, about Justification and the Sacrament, which are so remote from our present state of mind that it is hard to take even a faint interest in them, or to understand what they are about. But this is interspersed with a number of interesting discussions of a more general kind, and the whole has the merits which distinguished the best controversial style of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century—merits which in the present day are occasionally to be found in our very best journalists, and which are perhaps displayed more forcibly in some of the articles in Bayle's Dictionary than in any other writer who could be mentioned.

With all these advantages, the *Histoire des Variations* is no more than a party pamphlet, written to prove a point which no one in the present day would dispute—the point, namely, that the word Protestantism represents no one definite and complete system of theology. Most modern readers of the book, indeed,

will be inclined to agree with Mr. Hallam's criticism, that it is odd that Bossuet should have found so few variations amongst the Protestants of his day, for certainly the differences on which he dwells are for the most part so technical that few laymen would care about or even understand them. They leave completely untouched the broad outline of Christianity which is drawn in the three creeds, and they need not of necessity much affect forms of public worship.

The art of the whole book consists in dwelling upon the points of difference, to the exclusion of the points of agreement, between the various Protestant bodies, and in tacitly assuming that there can be no revelation at all from God to man, which does not include the means of solving, in a conclusive manner, every question which human ingenuity can connect with any part of it.

The only difference between the controversies among Protestants and the innumerable controversies which before and after Bossuet's time occurred in the Christian Church, quite apart from Protestantism, was that Protestantism recognised no general ecclesiastical judge of controversy whose decisions were to be binding on all. Not only was controversy no new thing among Christians, but Bossuet himself was engaged in a variety of eager controversies with the members of his own communion, not the least of which was the great controversy as to the rights of the Pope over the Gallican Church, and as to the rights of General Councils, Popes, and Bishops respectively.

Thus the real distinction which the *Histoire des Variations* brings out between Protestants and Roman Catholics is not that the Protestants differ amongst themselves while the Roman Catholics agree amongst themselves, but that the Roman Catholics submit their differences to a common authority, while the Protestants do not.

That the decisions of this authority are perfectly consistent and infallibly true are further propositions, quite distinct from the proposition of fact just laid down. They are, however, essential to Bossuet's case, which is very pointedly stated in his preface. 'Faith speaks simply; the Holy Spirit diffuses pure lights, and the truth which he teaches has always a uniform language. It requires little knowledge of the history of the Church to know that she has opposed to every heresy proper and precise explanations which she has never changed; and attention to the expressions by which she has condemned heretics will show that these explanations always attack the error in its source, by the shortest and straightest road. This is why whatever varies, whatever is encumbered with doubtful and intricate terms, has always been suspected as not only fraudulent, but moreover absolutely false, because it shows an embarrassment which truth does not know.'

The most compendious and, as it appears to us, by far the most interesting and pithy of Bossuet's controversial performances is the last part of the *Sixième Avertissement aux Protestants*. It is his final

answer to Jurieu, who had replied to the *Histoire des Variations* by pointing out that the Roman Catholic system was open to precisely the same criticisms as the different forms of Protestantism, and that it was not only impossible to show that that system, as expounded at the Council of Trent, had come down from heaven, but easy to demonstrate that it had been put together by degrees, and was in fact nothing more than the aggregate of a number of quasi-judicial decisions upon controversies as they happened to arise, delivered by an authority which could make out no reasonable claims to infallibility. To this home-thrust Bossuet answers by an argument exactly like those with which Dr. Newman has made the present generation familiar, about the tendency of Protestantism to universal disbelief, and to universal tolerance and indifference in religion.

A few short specimens of this vigorous appeal may be new to some of our readers, and they have, it must be owned, a strangely modern air. First, he says, 'you will get civil toleration, but civil toleration—that is to say, impunity granted by the magistrate to all sects—is necessarily connected in the spirit of those who maintain it, with ecclesiastical toleration; and we must not consider these two sorts of toleration as opposed to each other, but the last as the pretext with which the other conceals itself. If men openly professed ecclesiastical toleration—that is to say, if they recognised all heretics as true members and true children of the Church—



they would mark too clearly religious indifference. They pretend, therefore, to confine themselves to civil toleration. For what do those who consider all religions indifferent care for the condemnation of the Church? No one need fear its censures except those who have churches, pulpits, or ecclesiastical pensions to lose; as for the other indifferents, so long as the magistrate leaves them in repose they will tranquilly enjoy the liberty which they allow themselves of thinking as they please, which is the charm by which men's minds are thrown into these libertine opinions.'

Intolerance, civil as well as ecclesiastical, is the corner-stone of Bossuet's system. He speaks of 'the Catholic religion, the most severe and the least tolerant of all religions.' He says, 'We see then what makes the' (Roman Catholic) 'Church so odious to Protestants. It is principally, and above all her other dogmas, her holy and inflexible incompatibility, if I may use the phrase; it is that she will be alone, because she considers herself the wife, a title which does not admit of being shared.'

Elsewhere he speaks of it as 'a Church which lays down as its foundation that there is neither life nor salvation out of its communion,' and he says of Jurieu that he 'confesses formally the crime of which he is accused, which is that people may be saved in the Socinian communion'—people, that is, who, though not Socinians, externally conformed to Socinianism. And again, 'It is still worse, if possible, to save such

a hypocrite than to save a Socinian, because one may be a Socinian through ignorance, and with a sort of good faith.' The consequence of toleration is utter unbelief. 'If we must of necessity let loose human reason' ('mettre au large la raison humaine'), 'and if this is the great achievement of the Reformation, why not free it from all the mysteries, and in particular from that of the Trinity and the Incarnation, as well as that of the Real Presence, for reason is not more shocked with the one than the other.'

The most striking passage of all is one in which he exposes, certainly with triumphant success, the absurdity of the view entertained by Jurieu himself that the civil magistrate ought to punish heresy. If so, he argues, the civil magistrate must decide what is heresy; and what will be the consequence? 'They will prove to him by refined criticism that one passage, and then another, and then another, have been foisted into the Gospel. He will not know how far that goes, but it is clear that it goes to everything. Soon he will be led to see that neither the apostles nor the evangelists nor the prophets were really inspired, that it required no inspiration to reason like St. Paul, and still less to relate what one had seen oneself, like St. Matthew; in a word, that nothing is certainly inspired except the very words of the Saviour, and that even he accommodated his language to common opinions, in quoting the prophets and the other sacred writers as being truly inspired by God when they were not. All this, you will say,

is impiety. Still it is the question which is now at issue with the Socinians.'

He contrasts with the magistrate who is obliged to listen to all this 'fine critique,' the Fathers of the early Church, 'where the sovereign reason was to say, We baptize to-day in the same faith in which we have been baptized, and we consider worthy of anathema those who, by condemning their predecessors, suppose that they have discovered error in the Church of Jesus Christ.'

After quoting as a portent Chillingworth's famous passage about the Bible being the religion of Protestants, and Burnet's disclaimer of infallibility, he sums up the whole in a passage of which the following expressions give the essence. 'You now see the present state of the Reformation, and the tendency of these pretended Churches, the foundation of which is, that there is on the earth nothing living and speaking to which we ought to subject ourselves in matters of religion. Socinianism pours in to them like a flood, under the name of toleration; the mysteries go one after the other; faith is extinguished, human reason takes its place, and they fall in a torrent into religious indifference.' In another part of the same tract he contrasts this with the flourishing state of religion in France, as to which he says that, if there were any Socinians, he should probably know them, and that he cannot mention a single one.

This is a slight sketch of Bossuet's famous argument against the Protestants. It admits of being

stated shortly, because the greater part of the books in which it is contained are occupied with matter which is now pretty nearly obsolete. We will make one general observation upon it.

It is very common to assert that whether the Roman Catholic view as put forward by Bossuet—and no one ever put it forward with equal power or plausibility—be true or false, it is at least thoroughly logical, and far superior to the half-meanings, subterfuges, and inconsistencies of Protestant writers. In short, Dryden's famous lines, 'To take up half on faith and half to try,' express, in a few words, the criticism which people who like to dispose of large subjects in a compressed succinct way have generally made upon such writings. Surely, however, when the matter is fairly considered, this is an entire fallacy.

A very short answer may be given to the whole of Bossuet's argument. The Protestants might have replied to him, 'All that you say is, that upon our principles we ought to be Socinians, or Deists, or Atheists if you please, if their views are supported by stronger arguments and better evidence than ours. This we admit, and so must every one else who is not prepared to give some other reason for believing in his creed than that it is true, and to give some other test of truth than reason and evidence. Authority is only another name for evidence. If God himself asserted a fact, such an assertion would not be evidence of the fact addressed to the reason of the

person to whom the assertion was made, unless truth were assumed or proved to be an attribute of God. Take, therefore, the highest possible view of Church authority, and you never alter the case. Judges, as Chillingworth unanswerably says we all must be, the Protestant judges that this is the road, and the Catholic that this is the guide who knows the road.'

In a word, Bossuet's whole argument is either an appeal to reason as to the infallibility of the Church—which is just as much an appeal to reason as if the issue were as to the truth of the doctrines of the Church—or else it is a passionate exhortation to keep your eyes shut as tight as possible, because, if you once open them, you will see what you do not like. Believe all this without inquiry, because perhaps inquiry will prove that it is false.

If Bossuet did not mean to say that the Socinian and the Deist could out-argue the Lutheran and Calvinist, his argument is pointless. If he did, it proves that their views are true, for he uses no arguments at all against them which are not open to the Protestant as well. His sole argument on behalf of Church authority may be thus expressed: There must be an infallible Church, for if there is none, who is to put down the Socinians? which is no argument against Socinians, and not an honest argument against the orthodox Protestants. Jurieu might have retorted conclusively upon Bossuet by asking how he proposed to deal with the Socinians? He might of course burn them, but, if he had to answer them, he must do so

upon some other principle than that of Church authority, which they denied ; and whatever other answer he found would be available to Protestants as well as to himself.

Perhaps the most obvious remark on Bossuet as a controversialist is that he was, beyond all question, the forerunner of Voltaire. As Lord Macaulay well observed, you have only to join the proposition that transubstantiation is nonsense to the proposition that it is an essential doctrine of Christianity, and you obtain an obvious inference. It is very remarkable, and strongly characteristic of the rash, heated, vehement temper of the man and of his nation, that he should not have appreciated the tremendous risk to which he was exposing his creed by the way in which he stated it. Notwithstanding all his predictions, England, at the end of the century of which Bossuet saw the beginning, was far more orthodox than France, and English theologians made an incomparably better fight against the Deists in the eighteenth century, than was made by the Roman Catholics. It would be difficult to find amongst the French writers of the eighteenth century Christian apologists who could be compared in power or in influence to the line of writers of whom Tillotson and Horsley mark the two extremities.

## VII

### LOCKE'S ESSAY ON THE HUMAN UNDERSTANDING <sup>1</sup>

It may reasonably be doubted whether any writer on philosophical subjects ever produced such a broad, solid effect on the minds of the English people as Locke. Nor do we think that his influence has been or will be much diminished, although no one has ever produced a more vigorous reaction against his teaching. Read the Essay on the Human Understanding, and you will be continually under the impression that you are reading the commonplaces of all contemporary literature reduced to a philosophical shape. Read the Essay on Civil Government or the Letters on Toleration, and the same reflection continually presents itself—this is the doctrine which I have heard all my life, on which people all round me are continually acting, and against which more aspiring forms of philosophy are only protests which

<sup>1</sup> *An Essay concerning Human Understanding.* By John Locke, Gent.

have not as yet succeeded, and do not seem likely to succeed, in reaching the minds of the great body of people who think about philosophy.

There is, indeed, no one of the great departments of life in which Locke has not exercised, and does not to this day exercise, a degree of influence which is perhaps, in itself, the strongest evidence supplied by the history of modern speculation, of the practical importance of philosophical inquiries. Hardly any writer, too, has been made the subject of so much comment of the controversial kind. Reid, Dugald Stewart, Sir William Hamilton, De Maistre, M. Victor Cousin and many others — almost every one, in a word, who has believed in any of the various forms of idealism which have succeeded each other for the last century or more in England, Germany, and France — has criticised Locke, with more or less dissent, and more or less justice to his great qualities.

He has, indeed, been made the centre of so extensive a literature that a man who forms his opinion of him from reading his books for himself can hardly fail to be conscious of a certain presumption. It seems too coarse and blunt a way of making acquaintance with books about which so much has been said. Still it is difficult not to feel that the question which the Count in the *Soirées de St. Petersburg* asks of his interlocutor, before they go into the subject of Locke, 'l'avez vous lu?' might be not altogether superfluous with respect to many



of his modern critics, for the Essay on the Human Understanding is one of those books which has been so thoroughly assimilated by that part of the world which cares in the most cursory manner for speculative subjects, that large numbers of people naturally suppose themselves to have read it, when in point of fact they never have.

I will, therefore, give a very short account of the arrangement and sequence of its parts, before making a few observations on some points connected with it. One of the most ingenious and striking criticisms ever made upon it is the one which was made by Horne Tooke in the *Diversions of Purley*. He speaks of the essay as 'a grammatical treatise, or a treatise on words or on language,' and describes its title as 'a lucky mistake' which attracted readers who would not have cared to read it, if it had been called, as it should have been, a Grammatical Essay.

Like most vigorous paradoxes, this has a good deal of truth in it, though it is very far from being entirely true. The book may fairly be said to consist mainly of an inquiry into the meaning of those words which are most usually employed in philosophical speculations, followed up by an inquiry into the general theory of language, and the states of mind which different kinds of language refer to, such as knowledge, doubt, and assent in its various degrees. It is not, as its title would imply, an essay on the thinking faculty itself; and the difficulty which has been found in

understanding certain parts of it has arisen principally from the circumstance that it does not contain, as is the case with several other works which may properly be compared with it—Hobbes's *Leviathan*, for instance, and Tucker's *Light of Nature*—any attempt to describe clearly the faculties of the mind itself. So far at least as they are the subject of inquiry at all, they are spoken of, not as they are in themselves, but as they are displayed in their operation upon particular subjects and collections of thoughts. We are told, for instance, of the manner in which the mind compares and compounds together, or in which it separates from each other, particular ideas, but no separate names are assigned to the faculties by which it performs these operations. .

The whole book would have been wonderfully cleared up, and the true relation of its author to other philosophers would have been set in a much clearer light than that in which it stands at present, if it had contained a chapter on the Imagination, another on the Memory, another on the Judgment, considered as functions or operations of the mind itself, in the place of the 9th, 10th, and 11th chapters of the Second Book, on Perception, Retention, and Discerning, each of which is regarded, not as it is felt by the mind, but in its effects upon particular thoughts.

The obscurity and confusion which, as all Locke's critics have observed, is introduced into the whole work by the indefinite and inconsistent manner in which he uses the word 'idea' might have been almost

entirely avoided if he had given a clear account of his view of the province of the imagination, and had said plainly whether he recognised any other 'immediate object of the mind in thinking' (this is his own definition of 'ideas' in his answer to Stillingfleet) than mental pictures.

Whoever reads his book carefully will find that much might be said on both sides of this question. In almost innumerable instances he uses the word as if it were synonymous with 'mental picture.' He says, for instance, 'The ideas of our youth often die before us. The pictures drawn in our minds are laid in fading colours.' So 'the idea of the particular colour of gold is not to be got by any description of it, but only by the frequent exercise of the eyes about it.' But elsewhere he says, 'There is an eternal, most powerful, most knowing Being, which whether any one will please to call God it matters not. The thing is evident, and from this *idea*, duly considered, will easily be deduced all those other attributes which we ought to ascribe to this Eternal Being.'

The contrast between the two senses in which the word *idea* is used in these passages is only one out of a very large number which might be taken, and the want of a definite psychology which this indicates may perhaps be considered as the principal defect of a book which ought never to be mentioned without admiration.

It must, however, be observed, on the other hand, that this defect gives Locke's work wider con-

nections than it would otherwise have had with the different schools of philosophy. There are certain parts of it which almost connect him with the idealism of which he was the great opponent. It is difficult, for instance, to make much of his chapter 'Of our Knowledge of the Existence of a God' (Book IV: ch. x.), without resorting to propositions which it is very hard indeed to derive from mere experience. The whole argument proceeds on the proposition that 'man knows by an intuitive certainty that bare nothing can no more produce any real being than it can be equal to two right angles.' That nothing producing something is an unmeaning collection of sounds is most true; but to infer, from the fact that a particular set of sounds raises no picture in the mind, the fact that the same sort of being must have existed from all eternity—a word which does not raise a more distinct image than the word nothing—is to leave altogether the ground of sensation, imagination, and experience.

Passing from the deficiencies of the essay to its contents, it is impossible to praise too highly the wonderful labour, fertility of mind, and shrewdness of observation which it displays. It was the work of about nineteen years, having been begun about 1670, and published for the first time in 1689, when Locke was fifty-seven years of age. Its purpose is happily expressed in the first page, as being 'to inquire into the original certainty and extent of human knowledge, together with the grounds and degrees of belief,

opinion, and assent.' It may be convenient to say a word or two as to its present scope, well known as it is.

The First Book, 'Of Innate Notions,' refutes the doctrine that certain notions are innate.

\* The Second Book, 'Of Ideas,' classifies and analyses ideas which must be understood, in this place, in the large sense of all the objects of the mind in thinking—in other words, our thoughts on all subjects.

The Third Book, 'Of Words'—which is usually, and we think with justice, regarded as the most remarkable part of the whole essay—is an examination of language considered as the instrument of thought.

The Fourth Book, 'Of Knowledge and Opinion,' describes the result ultimately reached by our thinking, whether in the shape of knowledge, or in that of opinion or belief.

The positive part of the book thus tells us what we think about, what thinking means, what instruments we use for the purpose of thinking, and what is the result of the operation. To make the plan complete, as we have already observed, there ought to be a description of the thinking subject itself, and an account of the degree to which, and the manner in which, it may be made its own object. The second sentence of the book directly recognises and proposes this design, but, as we have tried to show, it is very imperfectly carried out.

Leaving this, however, we will say a few words on

the topics handled in each of the four books. •The First Book, which attacks the doctrine of innate notions, is one to which, in the present state of speculation, it is difficult to do justice. To understand its value, we ought to have a degree of knowledge, which it would not be worth the while of any competent person to acquire, of what in Locke's time was still to some degree regarded as the orthodox philosophy of the schools.

Notwithstanding the shocks which scholasticism had received ever since the revival of learning, a great deal of its spirit still survived all over Europe in the latter half of the seventeenth century. All the great writers of that century—Chillingworth, Jeremy Taylor, Bossuet, Bayle, to mention a few out of many instances—wrote with a sort of half-respectful, half-contemptuous reference to it, as if it was a sort of learning of which learned men ought not to be ignorant, but which at the same time they ought to be able to dispense with, and leave on one side. On the other hand, the great thinkers of the age, and especially Descartes and Hobbes, vehemently attacked it, from their different points of view; so that it is known to ordinary readers of the present day principally by the attacks made upon it, or by the half-contemptuous use of it by writers who were rather proud to know something about it, though they felt that its day was past.

The First Book of Locke's essay is obviously levelled at the views entertained by men bred up in these

doctrines. What it proves beyond all possibility of doubt, as it seems to us, is that the minds of men are not furnished from their birth with a certain number of cut-and-dried propositions of incontrovertible truth, which are the foundations of all their general knowledge. It is difficult to understand how any one ever can have believed, or have seriously supposed himself to believe, that children come into the world observing 'Whatever is is,' and 'It is impossible for a thing to be and not to be.'

On another ground Locke's arguments do not appear to touch, or even to be aimed at, the more recent forms of the doctrine of innate ideas, such, for instance, as the doctrine that the mind does not derive from experience the form which experience—that is, sensation—receives when submitted to its action; in other words, that the mind is naturally furnished with the means of classifying the impressions which sensation supplies to it, so that, when a number of different impressions are brought before it, it recognises them as different, when the same impression is brought before it more than once it recognises it as the same, and so on. Whether such views as these are true or false is another question, but they are not the sort of 'innate notions' against which Locke's arguments were directed; and it is by no means certain that they might not be brought under the head of 'ideas of reflection' which he gives as one class of our ideas.

This brings us to the subject of his Second Book,

which deals with the origin and classification of our thoughts. All our ideas—taking the word in its most extended term—he ranges under the two heads of ideas of sensation and ideas of reflection. His language in his book, as we have already observed, appears to imply that ideas of all sorts are in the nature of mental pictures. ‘Let us suppose,’ he says, ‘the mind to be white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas; how comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? To this I answer in one word, from Experience.’ Under the head of Experience, however, Locke distinctly includes experience of the operations of our own minds, ‘which operations, when the soul comes to reflect on and consider, do furnish the understanding with another set of ideas which could not be had from things without, and such are perception, thinking, doubting, etc.’ The perception of their operations, ‘though it be not sense, is very like it, and might properly enough be called “internal sense.”’

These are the ideas of reflection, and between ideas of reflection as understood by Locke, and the doctrine of innate ideas as stated by modern advocates of that opinion, there appears to us to be less difference than is perhaps usually supposed to exist. If it is admitted on the one hand that if the mind were destitute of experience it would never have any knowledge at all either of itself, or of the external world, and if it is



conceded, on the other, that external experience sets at work certain internal faculties, of the nature and operations of which men are as directly conscious as they are of different colours, or of the pains and pleasures of the senses, the question whether experience is the only source of knowledge, and whether ideas are or are not innate, becomes a matter rather of propriety of language than of fact.

The analysis of the different forms of thought, of which the rest of the Second Book is made up, is, like all such analyses, rather dry. The reduction of solidity, duration, power, and the like, to cases of sensation or reflection is an indispensable part of the task which Locke and other writers on the same subject propose to themselves, yet it is the least interesting part of their work.

Some, however, of Locke's chapters may be noticed in passing, because of their close connection with other works. His chapter on 'The Idea of Power' (Book II. cxxi.), which includes his theory of free will and the foundations of morals, is almost identical with Hobbes's view of the same subject. It is, indeed, singular that he should travel over exactly the same portion without quoting or referring to him, though he falls into almost the same expressions at times. Hobbes and Locke both insist on the incongruity of the ideas of will and freedom. Where a man can do what he likes, he is free to do what he likes; but whether he shall like this or that, is a question with which his will is in no

way concerned. The liking—the wish to do this or that—is the will, and this wish or will is free when it is able to gratify itself. To ask whether it calls itself into existence is to talk nonsense.

The chapter on 'Cause and Effect' (xxvi.) naturally suggests Hume's more celebrated speculation on the same subject. Locke dismisses the matter in a single paragraph. We observe, he says, that several qualities and substances begin to exist, and that they 'receive this their existence from the due application and operation of some other being.' 'That which produces any simple or complex idea we denote by the general word "cause," and that which is produced "effect."' It must be owned that this 'producing' and 'receiving their existence' are very vague phrases, and Locke does not seem to have been aware of the difficulty of attaching to them any other signification than that of invariable sequence and antecedence.

The chapters on 'Our Complex Ideas of Substance' (xxiii.), and on 'Distinct and Confused Ideas' (xxix.), are the introduction to Berkeley, as the chapter last mentioned is the introduction to Hume. When, indeed, we read Locke with a knowledge of Berkeley, it is difficult to see how Locke failed to hold part at all events of Berkeley's most characteristic doctrines, if indeed he did not hold them. Can anybody, *e.g.*, be more Berkeleian than this: 'The substance wood, which is a certain collection of simple ideas so called, by the application of fire is turned into another substance called "ashes"—*i.e.* another complex idea

consisting of a collection of simple ideas quite different from that complex idea which we call wood.' Substance, indeed, as explained by Locke, is—to use a significant bull—as unsubstantial a thing as Berkeley himself could wish, for he appears to regard it as an 'obscure imperfect hypothesis, which we frame because we cannot do without it, but which does not represent any existing fact. All that Berkeley adds to this is, that we can do perfectly well without a word which adds nothing to our knowledge, and is not even an instructive admission of ignorance.

The Third Book classifies words, the instruments of thought, as the Second classifies the thoughts themselves. Hallam, Lord Macaulay, and Mr. Mill rival each other in their praise of this part of the work; and it is, indeed, a complete and admirable vindication and exemplification of the fundamental doctrine of the school of which Locke is certainly the greatest master. It might be shortly expressed by saying, that to be the masters, and not the slaves, of language, is the condition of all real knowledge; that all words whatever are signs and names of our own apprehensions of things, and not independent truths annexed to certain things, independently of the human will, and capable of instructing us as to matters of fact, when duly studied. This is worked out at length, by Locke, in eleven chapters of which it is impossible to get any notion except by careful study.

We may observe, however, that any one who wishes to see how much great men may have in common where

no suspicion of plagiarism can exist, ought to compare these chapters with the chapter on 'Speech' (Pt. I. ch. iv.) in Hobbes's *Leviathan*, and with the scattered references to the same subject which are to be found in other parts of that extraordinary work. The difference between the two is the difference between the seed and the plant. Hobbes gives the principles of the subject with a piercing subtlety and vigorous mother wit, which are not exactly the characteristic qualities of Locke; but Locke works out the whole question from beginning to end with a patient, comprehensive, laborious sagacity which is past all praise, and has raised an imperishable monument to his honour.

The last Book, 'Of Knowledge and Opinion,' pleases us less than the rest of the Essay. The forte of Locke's mind was comprehensiveness and sagacity, but he was not, we think, equally happy in precision, or in that sort of subtlety which goes along with precision. With all his study of language, he is at times imposed upon by words, as in the case of cause and effect and substance; and the turn of mind, whatever it was, that led him away from psychology produced a good deal of obscurity in parts of his works. He defines knowledge, for instance, as 'the perception of the connection and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy, of any of our ideas'; and, as we have already noticed, he uses 'idea,' in this Fourth Book, not in the sense of mental image or picture in which he had generally used it before, but in some other

sense the nature of which does not very clearly appear.

Moreover, it is not very easy to understand clearly part of what he says as to the agreement of ideas. Agreement, he tells us, may be of four kinds, and 'may consist either in identity and diversity, or in relations of various kinds, as equality, or in coexistence, or in 'actual real existence.' It is not easy to understand what he means by 'actual real existence,' or indeed what was his notion of 'reality.'

The whole of this book, which is the crown and conclusion of the work, looks out, so to speak, into a region which Locke did not explore, and is, if we may venture to criticise so great a man, not altogether consistent with the general turn of the earlier books. It assumes throughout a whole set of truths, the derivation of which from sensation or reflection is not clearly made out. His account, for instance, of reasoning and demonstration continually suggests the criticism that he is trying to leap off his own shadow, by professing to find in sensation and reflection more than they do or can contain.

There are also several chapters in which he appears to fall repeatedly into the error of which he was the most eager and thoroughgoing antagonist, that of arguing from sounds to facts. Such is his chapter (Book-IV. ch. x.) 'Of our Knowledge of the Existence of a God,' throughout the whole of which he appears to argue from the incapacity of the human mind to conceive this or that to the existence of such and such

states of fact. To deduce, from the maxim *ex nihilo nihil fit*, that there must always have been a Being of some sort, and that that Being must have been cogitative, and must have contained in itself from the first all the perfections that could ever exist afterwards; and further to assert that this Being could not be material and so forth, is in reality to manufacture knowledge out of ignorance, thinly disguised by words which are almost unmeaning.

Locke's theology, and his theories about the nature of the soul, form a sort of parenthesis in his system which by no means harmonises with the rest of it. After his excursion into the region of *a priori* speculation in chap. x., he returns in chap. xi. to our knowledge of the existence of other things than God and ourselves, and here he immediately reverts to his natural tone. 'The knowledge of the existence of any other thing we can have only by sensation, for there being no necessary connection of real existence with any idea a man hath in his memory, nor of any other existence but that of God with the existence of any other being, no particular man can know the existence of any other being, but only when by actual operation upon him it makes itself perceived by him. For the having the idea of anything in our mind no more proves the existence of that thing than the picture of a man evidences his being in the world, or the visions of a dream make thereby a true history.' Many points of the rest of the book are admirable. For instance, the whole

doctrine of the degrees of assent, and of the means by which assent is produced, and especially his estimate of the nature and use of the syllogism, are out of all comparison superior to anything else written on such topics in his own days, or till very long afterwards.

We cannot affect to give within any moderate compass more than the barest sketch of the ground-plan of a work like this ; yet the very slightness of the sketch may give it a certain interest, as a few pencil-strokes will sometimes give a notion of a face more easy to take in and remember than an elaborate picture.

## VIII

### LOCKE AS A MORALIST

THE question of Locke's position as a moralist is naturally suggested by what has gone before. Hardly any writer has had, in the long run, so great an influence on moral speculation; yet, so far as we know, he never handles the subject systematically. He lays down, indeed, its fundamental principles in his *Essay*, but he does not in any place work the matter out in detail, and in all its connections. It is, however, highly instructive, especially in reference to the later developments of the philosophy of which he was the founder, to see how Locke treated moral questions, and from what side he approached them. The very fact that he never applied his principles specifically to concrete subjects, as Paley and Bentham did long afterwards, and as Hobbes had done before him, gives peculiar clearness to the relation in which they stand to what we now call Utilitarianism.

The moral principles of the *Essay on the Human Understanding* are not easy to connect (as we shall



attempt to show in noticing his political works) with the principles on which he treats the origin of governments, the rights of subjects and rulers, and the like. Locke, like Hobbes, would appear to have stopped short in his speculations, and to have allowed his mind to be influenced by words of which his own theories, fully carried out to all their consequences, would have greatly reduced the importance. Hobbes was a utilitarian, and an enemy of abstractions which do not represent facts, if ever there was one; yet Hobbes found it necessary to base all his political speculations upon a supposed social contract, for the keeping of which his philosophy provided no reason. Locke was the great enemy of the doctrine of innate ideas, yet it is exceedingly difficult to understand his theory of rights and natural laws without resorting to some view of the nature of rights and laws which involves that doctrine in one shape or another.

The passages of the *Essay on the Human Understanding* which principally relate to this subject, and which contain the germs of much speculation which was afterwards most fruitful, occur principally in two chapters (xx. and xxi.) of the Second Book. Chapter xx. is headed, 'Of Modes of Pleasure and Pain,' and chapter xxi. 'Of Power.' Each belongs to that division of the whole work which is concerned with ideas, and to that branch of the subject which relates to ideas of reflection, though pain and pleasure are naturally enough rated as ideas of sensation as well.

Locke's views upon the fundamental questions of

morals are expressed in connection with these two heads, and grow out of his investigation of them. His definition of good and evil is almost verbally the same with that of Hobbes. 'Things are good and evil only in reference to pleasure and pain. That we call "good" which is apt to cause or increase pleasure or diminish pain in us. . . . And, on the contrary, we name that "evil" which is apt to produce or increase any pain or diminish any pleasure in us.' Good and evil, he tells us, 'are the hinges on which our passions turn'—not a very happy, or indeed a completely intelligible, metaphor; and he proceeds to enumerate and define the passions in a passage much inferior, as it appears to us, to Hobbes's brilliant effort on the same subject.

This part of the matter is despatched in a couple of pages; but the chapter on 'Power,' which shows how good and evil are connected with our conduct, is one of the longest and most elaborate, though not perhaps one of the happiest, in the book. The pure elementary notion of power, as Locke understood it, is not altogether perspicuous. By observing changes in all sorts of objects we get to 'consider in one thing the possibility of having any of its simple ideas changed, and in another the possibility of making that change'; and this possibility of changing or being changed is power, active or passive. Thus, for instance, fire and wax have respectively a power to melt and a power to be melted.

Our idea of power is derived principally from reflec-

tion, on the origin of voluntary motion in ourselves ; for thinking and motion are the only sorts of action of which we have any idea, and the motion of the various parts of our own bodies at the impulse of our wills is the only kind of motion which we are able to connect directly with active power. The motions of inanimate bodies suggest at most nothing more than what Locke describes as passive power—that is to say, a capacity of receiving motion transmitted from something else.

This being the general notion of power, Locke goes on to point out that there are in us two powers—namely, will and understanding. Will is the power ‘to begin or forbear, continue or end, several actions of our minds and motions of our bodies barely by a thought or preference of the mind.’ Volition is the exercise of that power with regard to any particular act. Understanding is the power of perception, which is of three sorts, including the perception of ideas in our minds, the perception of the signification of signs, and the perception of the connection or repugnancy, agreement or disagreement, there is between any of our ideas.

Locke carefully observes, and it is one of the most judicious observations to be found in the whole of his book, that the will and the understanding are by no means to be regarded as distinct agents, with their distinct provinces and authorities, acting like so many individuals, but rather as distinct acts of the same unit—the man ; just as seeing and crying are distinct

acts of the eye, or smelling and sneezing of the nose.

This account of power introduces an account of liberty. Liberty exists where, and extends as far as, a man is able to think or not to think, to move or not to move, according to the preference of his own mind. Necessity exists either where thought is absent, or where the power to act according to the preference of the mind is absent. It is impossible that a man should not do that which he is both willing and able to do, or that he should willingly do that which he does not prefer; though he may do that which he does not desire, for his preference may amount only to a choice of evils—as when we prefer a surgical operation to the continuance of a dangerous, though not painful, state of things which it is to remove.

Locke thus conceives the will as being a bare power, to which it would be an abuse of terms to apply such an epithet as free. It is like so much gunpowder which, if lighted, will explode with a certain degree of force, but the direction of that force, its application to this or that particular purpose, and the result produced by it, depend upon surrounding circumstances altogether independent of the powder itself. The man who either exerts the will or allows it to lie dormant is free; but the will itself is either operative or not, and is subject to no other qualification.

Such being the nature of the will, what is it that

calls it into activity? What is the spark which lights the powder? Not, says Locke, the prospect of happiness, but the sense of uneasiness. All desire is uneasiness, and 'the greatest present uneasiness is the spur to action which is constantly felt, and for the most part determines the will in its choice of the next action.' This expression, by the way, is not consistent with Locke's main theory. The choice, according to him, is the work of the understanding, and the will is merely the executive officer; so that the phrase ought to run, The greatest present uneasiness is the spur to action which is constantly felt, and is taken principally into account by the understanding in considering what course of conduct is on the whole preferable, and is thus the proximate cause of the action of the will in the direction so determined.

What, then, are these uneasinesses or desires, and is there any sort of relation amongst them, or any general theory by which their nature may be understood? Locke's answer is, that they one and all tend to happiness; but each particular man's happiness is different, for each man forms his own notion as to the state of things by which he would be satisfied; and this state of things, as a general rule, consists in the absence of all distinct uneasiness, combined with the presence of 'some few degrees of pleasure.'

The greatest conceivable degree of absent good is not capable in itself of exciting the desires of most men, or of making its absence felt as a want sufficient to put the will in motion. Hardly any one desires knowledge,

or talent, or greatness, or the joys of heaven, in such a manner that the want of them appears to him positively painful. It is, however, possible, by consideration of these things, to excite in the mind a desire to attain them, which may, under circumstances, become powerful enough at last to operate directly as a form of uneasiness upon the will.

It is also possible to endure the presence of any given form of uneasiness for a greater or less time, and during that interval 'to suspend the execution and satisfaction of any' of the desires, and to consider and weigh the various claims which different desires have upon us, and the consequence of satisfying this one or that. This power of deliberation, says Locke, 'seems to me the source of all liberty; in this seems to me to consist that which is (as I think, improperly) called free will.'

He then proceeds to show that to be determined by our own judgments is no restraint on our liberty, which, on the contrary, consists in attaining the good we choose. The purest of all beings, he says, must, from the nature of things, be so determined. 'The highest perfection of intellectual nature lies in a careful and constant pursuit of true and solid happiness,' and 'the care of ourselves, that we mistake not imaginary for real happiness, is the necessary foundation of our liberty.' The general result appears to be that in a cumbrous way, and with less perspicuous definitions, Locke comes to much the same

result as Hobbes with his definition of will as the 'last appetite in deliberation.'

After laying down these principles, Locke enters, according to his manner, into a detailed account of the various cases in which men may and do take imaginary for real pleasures. He concludes with the case of vice and virtue, as to which he says that the preference of vice to virtue is a manifest case of a wrong judgment, because 'the rewards and punishments of another life, which the Almighty has established as the enforcements of his law, are of weight enough to determine the choice against whatever pleasure or pain this life can show, when the eternal state is considered but in its bare possibility, which nobody can make any doubt of.' The best for which the bad man can hope, and the worst which the good man can fear, is annihilation; yet, 'if the worst that comes to the pious man, if he mistakes, be the best that the wicked can attain to if he be in the right, who can without madness run the venture? . . . If the good man be in the right, he is eternally happy; if he mistakes he is not miserable, he feels nothing. On the other hand, if the wicked be in the right, he is not happy; if he mistakes, he is infinitely miserable. Must it not be a most manifest wrong judgment that does not presently see to which side in this case the preference is to be given?'

This, in a condensed shape, is Locke's theory of morals. Its place in his general system is very curious. To find the principles of a moral system considered as

branches of the idea of power, is surprising at first sight; but it must be recollected that Locke's Essay deals, not, like Hobbes's *Leviathan*, with human nature in general, but exclusively with the human understanding; and it must also be recollected that one principal object of his analysis was to represent the different operations of the mind under as few heads, and in as simple forms as possible, and especially to do so without resorting to the theory of innate ideas, in any of the forms which it is capable of assuming.

This probably is the reason why his moral theories fall into what, at first sight, appears such an unnatural place. If the only operations of the human mind taken into account at all are perception and the act of volition, it is obvious that morality will come to be regarded exclusively as the system of motives by which our perceptions and volitions are regulated. The form into which such a theory falls may be stated thus: We have such and such powers. They are guided by such and such speculative principles, which direct them to such and such objects. By measuring the powers, specifying and defining the principles, and investigating with precision the objects aimed at, we at last acquire a system of morals complete as far as it goes, for it certainly supplies an answer to the three great problems of morality, "What is the difference between right and wrong? How can I know the one from the other? Why should I do right?"



'The system, however, leaves one gap which will no doubt appear most important to those who are not able to agree in Locke's general metaphysical theories. He makes hardly any reference whatever to conscience in any part of his work. So far as we know, there is but one paragraph in which it is even referred to. It is in Book I., ch. iii., sec. 8, the marginal note to which is 'Conscience no proof of any innate moral rule.' After attacking upon the usual grounds, and in particular upon the ground of the great varieties of belief which exist in the world on moral subjects, the notion that there are such things as innate moral rules, Locke disposes in ten lines of the whole question about conscience: 'I doubt 'not that, without being written on their hearts, many men may, by the same way that they come to the knowledge of other things, come to assent to several moral rules, and be convinced of their obligation. Others also may come to be of the same mind from their education, company, and customs of their country; which persuasion, however got, will serve to set conscience on work, which is nothing else but our own opinion and judgment of the moral rectitude or pravity of our own actions.'

Hobbes's view on the same subject is very similar, though he characteristically enters into the etymology of the word. The remarkable point about this is not so much the opinion itself as the crudity and unconcern with which it is expressed, and the apparent unconsciousness on the part of both these great men,

and especially on the part of Locke, that he was writing what, to a large, and perhaps the most popular school of moral philosophers in later times, would appear the heresy of all heresies, amounting to nothing less indeed than a denial of the crowning and ruling faculty of human nature itself. Hardly anything can be more striking in its way than the contrast between Locke and Butler on this point. With Butler, conscience is the master faculty, altogether independent of prudence and self-love, yet fitted, by the constitution of human nature itself, to take command of all the other faculties. With Locke, it is nothing more than an habitual way of thinking about moral subjects.

Upon the substance of Locke's theory several observations present themselves. Perhaps the most important of these is that, largely as it has since been adopted and followed out to a great variety of consequences which Locke himself did not connect with it, it never was, and never can be, enunciated with more plain-spoken and emphatic vigour. Bentham and Paley have not put this view more plainly or vigorously, and Bentham is less systematic than Locke, inasmuch as it is by no means easy to discover, from his writings any more than from Hume's, who held substantially the same theory, what in his opinion formed the ultimate sanction of morality.

It is difficult to suppose that either he or Hume really cared much for the religious sanction, whilst Bentham would have been the first to admit, and even

to contend, that, in his day at all events, the legal sanction had, in fact, singularly little to do with the greatest-happiness principle, whilst the popular sanction—public opinion—was so much misled by what he considered as delusive theories that it did very little towards enforcing it. But the religious, the political or legal, and the popular sanctions are the only sanctions which he recognises; and as each of them fails, this side of Bentham's theory is no doubt incomplete. Hume expressly owns that if a man will press far enough and hard enough for an answer to the question, Why should I do right? it will be very difficult to give him an answer which he would consider altogether satisfactory. With Locke there is no such hesitation or indistinctness. The sentences quoted above put the whole of his view of the subject as broadly, as tersely, and as plainly as it is possible to put it. The ultimate sanction of morals in his eyes is the fear of future punishment; or even, if you choose to reduce it a step lower, the consciousness that there is a chance, a possibility, of such punishments. The mere chance, as he observes, is quite enough to make vice a losing bargain.

It would be difficult probably to mention any single opinion which marks in a more striking manner the change which has come over the English mind in relation to the great problems of religion and morality, in the course of the last hundred and fifty years, than the popular estimate of utilitarianism, and of that which may be described as the criminal-

law theory of morals. The two are closely connected with each other, but their connection is in reality accidental. The criminal-law view of morals is that God has enacted a variety of moral rules for human conduct, the sanctions of which are eternal damnation and eternal salvation. It is obviously the worst possible policy to incur such a risk, and lose such an advantage, for any of the common enjoyments which induce men to break through these rules, and a determination not to do so on any account whatever, is no doubt a form, though rather a coarse and special form, of utilitarianism.

This, however, is by no means the view of the later utilitarians. Almost all of them, from Hume downwards, are disposed to avoid the subject of the sanction of morality, as being a distinct question from that which relates to the nature of morality itself, and to address themselves to the task of working out the problem, What course of conduct would produce a maximum of happiness if it were generally adopted? It appears to be assumed that, if this were ascertained, the question of sanctions would be perceived to be in reality of subordinate importance.

This produces a singular contrast, which in Locke's writings is strikingly perceptible, between the earlier and later utilitarians. They proceed upon tacit assumptions as to human nature which are diametrically opposed to each other. Locke's speculations are based throughout on the notion that the great

difficulty is to get men to do right, and that it is comparatively easy to know, or at all events to find out, what is right. Bentham writes as if he felt sure that you could depend upon morality to make its own way in the world, if it were once set upon a clear and systematic basis ; and it might thus be argued, with some plausibility, that he tacitly recognises conscience as a judge, though he deprives it of all authority as a legislator.

The tendency of all Mr. Mill's speculations is still more strongly in the same direction. Probably this difference in their estimate of human nature explains the curious difference which may be observed in the estimates formed at different times of the orthodoxy of utilitarianism. Nothing for a long time could be regarded as more 'orthodox'. Butler even, with all his strong tendencies in another direction, differs from Locke much more by addition than by positive dissent. Morality is, with him as much as with Locke, a system having for its object the attainment of happiness ; but he adds to the sanction of supernatural rewards and punishments—which are, so to speak, the steam of Locke's engine—other more general considerations derived from an examination of the constitution of human nature.

Nothing, indeed, is better marked than the near approach to unanimity with which the divines, moralists, and lawyers of the eighteenth century lean to various forms of the utilitarian doctrine. Blackstone, perhaps, with his love of decorous common-

places, affords as good an illustration as any one, and he sets out with the proposition that the law of God, or of nature, may be reduced to 'the one paternal precept,' 'that man should pursue his own true and substantial happiness.' In our own days, however, doctrines of this kind have got a character for heterodoxy. Bentham, Paley, and their living disciples are regarded as dangerous people, whose views, if they prevailed, would be inconsistent with the maintenance of established beliefs.

The reason appears to be twofold. On the one hand, the theological current has set away from that view of religion which regards it as a vast system of criminal law, justified sufficiently by the bare fact of its existence, and requiring no other justification. On the other hand, a system of morals founded on the specific and ascertainable utility of particular actions, and not on the utility of obeying a law which, whether reasonable or not, is backed by terrific sanctions, acts more or less as a rival to religion itself.

Constituted authorities in Church or State can obviously have no objection to a system which says, Polygamy being forbidden by the positive law of God, under pain of damnation, it is surely very foolish of you to marry two wives; but at the same time they may have the greatest possible objection to a system which says, Let us examine the consequences of polygamy, and determine whether it

is 'right or wrong by its tendency to promote human happiness or misery. And they do not view with very different eyes a system (like that of Austin) which adds to such advice the further clause, When you have discovered by observation what is the effect of a given practice upon human happiness or misery, you may infer further that, if it promotes human happiness, it is enjoined, and that if it diminishes it, it is forbidden, by God.

Whatever may have been his place in the history of utilitarianism, Locke certainly does not appear to have given that doctrine the special edge and point which is communicated to it by working out its consequences systematically in the field of political speculation. We shall illustrate this more fully in speaking of his *Essay on Civil Government*, and on *Toleration*. But this is the place for the general observation that the principles upon which Locke discusses these matters tend straight to the application made of them by Hobbes before his time, and by Bentham and Austin long afterwards, to the general conception of justice and of rights.

A person who fully accepts Locke's metaphysics, and who carries out to their natural result his views as to the foundation of morality, is led of necessity to the conclusion that there are only two definite senses in which the words 'right' and 'justice' can be used. They may be used, that is, as synonymous with 'power secured by law,' and 'impartial adherence to any fixed rule whatever.' Or they may be used to

mean, by way of distinction, 'powers suitable to the production of general happiness and secured by law,' and 'adherence to fixed rules tending to produce general happiness.'

Neither Hobbes nor Locke fully worked out this, and the result is that Hobbes founds his system on a supposed contract, without showing satisfactorily why you should keep that or any other contract when you have made it; and that Locke, throughout the whole of his political works, writes (as we shall try to show hereafter) upon a set of tacit suppositions as to rights, their value, their transmission, and the like, which it is not easy to put into plain words, and which he probably did not realise distinctly himself. This, however, can hardly be imputed to him as a fault. He comes across morality and politics in his great speculative work only indirectly, and by the somewhat eccentric path which we have tried to trace; and in the *Essay on Civil Government* and the *Letters on Toleration* he was writing with a distinctly practical aim, and of course adopted that turn of language, and form of expression, which he thought would be most likely to produce the practical result which he had in view.



## IX

### LOCKE ON GOVERNMENT<sup>1</sup>

LOCKE'S *Essay on Government*, famous as it is, and wonderful as was its success, is essentially a popular performance, and is, to a considerable extent, to be regarded also as an occasional one. As Warburton's *Essay on the Alliance between Church and State* might more properly have been entitled an attempt to construct a theory of the Church of England, the *Treatise on Government* might have been called a defence of the Revolution of 1688 considered in the abstract; still it deserves attention on several accounts, both as being singularly characteristic of Locke and as marking a point in the history of English speculation.

The first part of the treatise, which is a refutation of Sir Robert Filmer, is in the present day a

<sup>1</sup> *Two Treatises of Government. In the former, the False Principles and Foundation of Sir Robert Filmer and his Followers are detected and overthrown. The latter is an Essay concerning the True Original Extent and End of Civil Government.* By John Locke.

mere weariness to the flesh, and in no degree worth reading. To judge, indeed, from Locke's account of it, Sir Robert Filmer's doctrine must have been so monstrously absurd that the wonder is how it could ever have been thought to deserve a refutation. Adam, it appears, had supreme authority over all his descendants. Adam was the 'father, king, and lord over his family; a son, a subject, and a servant or slave were one and the same thing at first.' Somehow or other this sovereignty of Adam's came to be vested in kings, who accordingly are all absolute over their subjects.

Locke goes elaborately through all the different parts of this singular theory, discussing in separate chapters 'Adam's title to sovereignty by creation, his 'title by donation,' his 'title by' the subjection of Eve,' his 'title by fatherhood.' He discusses various questions of a sort of transcendental real-property law which it appears may have arisen between Cain and Seth and the three sons of Noah, upon whose respective rights we have this amongst other curious remarks: 'If the regal power descended to Shem as eldest and heir to his father, then "Noah's division of the world by lot to his sons, or *his ten years' sailing about the Mediterranean to appoint each son his part*" which our author tells us of, was labour lost.' We have then a long discussion of the difficult question, Who are and have been Adam's heirs? The only document with which we are acquainted which throws any light on this subject is a genealogy in the Library

of Trinity College, Cambridge, which traces the descent of Henry VIII. from Adam.

Locke raises questions not only as to the fact, which is obviously difficult enough to be ascertained, but also as to the law applicable to the fact. He observes with the utmost gravity, 'I go on then to ask whether, in the inheritance of this paternal power, the grandson by a daughter hath a right before a nephew by a brother?' and much more of the same kind. Except as a curious illustration of the sort of nonsense which has had its day in the world, all this matter is now of the very least possible interest.

The second part of the treatise, which is headed 'Of Civil Government,' is a work of quite a different order of merit. It was in its day extremely popular, and its practical effects were no doubt great, as it furnished people with the best and most accessible popular justification for the Revolution of 1688. It would be difficult, however, to find a better illustration of the fact that we have travelled a very long road since Locke's time, and have carried the metaphysical principles of which he perceived certain aspects, to consequences which have made his political speculations appear altogether superannuated and bygone. Few things can give so vivid a notion of the course which subsequent speculation has taken as to go back to books which in their day had a great name and almost boundless popularity, and to consider the reasons why they now fall so flatly upon us. This

is the only way in which we can learn what were the tacit assumptions in the minds of authors who were the guides of other generations than our own, and what was the method of their inquiries.

Locke begins with a definition of his subject—political power. This, he says, ‘I take to be a right of making laws with penalties of death, and consequently all less penalties, for the regulating and preserving of property, and of employing the force of the community in the execution of such laws, and in the defence of the commonwealth from foreign injury; and all this only for the public good.’ He then proceeds to give a sort of natural history of commonwealths. He begins with the state of nature from which they all spring, and thence he goes on to consider what war is according to the state of nature, what was the origin and object of civil society, how commonwealths are governed, what is the extent of the powers of the different branches of their governments, and how they are dissolved.

He says that by nature men are in ‘a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit within the bounds of the law of nature.’ It is, moreover, a ‘state of equality wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another; there being nothing more evident than that creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of nature and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst

another without 'subordination or subjection.' For this proposition Locke quotes Hooker, whose political theories, indeed, were substantially the same as his own. The state of nature, however, 'though a state of liberty, is not a state of licence.' 'It has a law to govern it which obliges every one, and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, property, or possessions,' because all men are the property of God, and 'there cannot be supposed any such subordination among us that may authorise us to destroy another as if we were made for one another's uses.'

The sanction of the law of nature is, in the state of nature, a right on the part of every man 'to punish the transgressors of that law to such a degree as may hinder its violation.' If the state of nature which Locke thus regards as a condition of equilibrium is disturbed, the result is war, which is 'a state of enmity and destruction.' The state of nature is 'a state of peace, goodwill, mutual assistance, and preservation,' in which men 'live together according to reason, without a common superior on earth with authority to judge between them.' War is a state where any of the parties live otherwise than according to reason, and in a state of 'force or a declared design of force, upon the person of another.' Slavery is 'a continued state of war between a lawful conqueror and a captive.'

'Property' is a phrase which Locke uses in a very

extended sense. He makes it include all rights whatever, and especially rights over a man's own person and the produce of his own labour. In fact, he places the origin of all property in labour, and shows at length how the value of all things, and especially the value of land, is derived from it exclusively. These proprietary rights, according to his view, existed in the state of nature, though they were highly insecure, by reason of the want of any known interpreter of the law of nature to ascertain, and of any organised sanction of the law of nature to secure them. The only restriction on liberty in the state of nature arises from paternal power, which, however, is not government properly speaking, for it does not authorise the parent to make laws for the child, or to punish him with death or otherwise. It is rather in the nature of an obligation on the parent to protect the child, during infancy, from the effects of his own weakness and immaturity.

These are the principal incidents of the state of nature. The state of civil society is instituted by way of remedy for its inconveniences. 'Men being by nature all free, equal, and independent, no one can be put out of this estate, and subjected to the political power of another, without his own consent.' As soon as any set of men associate themselves in order to institute political power, they 'make a community with power to act as one body, which is only by the will and determination of the majority; for that which binds any community being only the con-

sent of the individuals of it, and it being necessary to that which is one body to move one way, it is necessary the body should move that way whither the greater force carries it, which is the consent of the majority.' Hence, when people unite into a community out of a state of nature, they 'give up all the power necessary to the ends for which they unite into society, to the majority of the community, unless they expressly agreed in any number greater than the majority'

This naturally introduces the question, What are the ends of civil society? And to this Locke answers—To avoid the inconveniences of the state of nature, by providing means for the protection of property, in the large sense in which he uses the word—by the appointment, first of a settled law, next of a settled judge, and lastly of a sufficient sanction to put the law in force when made and interpreted, all of which are wanting in the state of nature.

Having thus laid down the fundamental principles of his theory, Locke goes on to describe the forms into which the government may be thrown, as to which he merely repeats the old classification of monarchies, aristocracies, and democracies; and thence he passes to a consideration of the extent of the powers thus granted by the people at large to their various subordinates. With a view to this, he considers first, the extent of the legislative power, which he says is subject to four limitations. First, it cannot be arbitrary over the lives and fortunes of the members of the

community ; for no one can transfer more power than he has, and no one has absolute arbitrary power over himself or any other. Secondly, the legislative power must govern by promulgated standing laws, and known authorised judges, and not by arbitrary decrees. Otherwise the inconvenience of the vagueness of the law of nature would not be avoided. Thirdly, the legislative power cannot take from any man part of his property without his consent, for the preservation of property was the object of the association. Fourthly, the legislative power cannot transfer the power of making laws to any other hands. The executive power is dependent on the legislative power, and beyond them both 'there remains still in the people a supreme power to remove or alter the legislative.'

Locke then proceeds to describe the position in which, upon this theory, the different members of a government stand to each other and to the people at large. He describes the functions of the executive, and in particular he describes prerogative as a discretionary power put into the hands of the executive authority for special purposes which may happen to arise.

Having thus investigated what he regards as the normal and regular genesis of civil society, he proceeds to consider the case of conquest, by which political power may be acquired. He limits the rights of conquest, first, to the case of a just war. Next, in point of extent, he limits the right of the



conqueror to the power which he gets over so many of the conquered people as 'have actually assisted, concurred, or consented to that unjust force that is used against him.' Over their lives the conqueror obtains a perfectly despotic and absolute power, 'but he has not thereby a right and title to their possessions.' The conqueror may take away the life of the conquered, 'and destroy him if he pleases as a noxious creature,' because the existence of a just war presupposes that the person attacked is a noxious creature; but as to the property, he has a right only to damages and costs, and that is subject moreover to the rights of the wife and children of the person conquered. Length of time gives no greater rights than thesê. Unless there be a subsequent compact between the conquered and the conqueror, the state of war continues, and may last for centuries. 'Who doubts but the Greek Christians, descendants of the ancient possessors of that country, may justly cast off the Turkish yoke, which they have so long groaned under, whenever they have an opportunity to do it?'

The rest of the treatise consists of an inquiry into the cases of abuse of power which may make it necessary for the people to exercise their ultimate right of altering the framework of Government. These are—usurpation, tyranny, and generally such conduct on the part of the person in possession of power, as is altogether inconsistent with the purposes for which he, or his predecessors, were invested with their power. As might have been expected, several of the cases in

question are generalised from the precedent of the Revolution, for the essay appeared in 1689, and its principles certainly prove that James II. had incurred the penalty of deposition under nearly every head under which he could have incurred it.

The treatise concludes with answers to the objections which may be made to the right of resistance. The gist of these is, that people are in more danger from unlimited power in the government than from a right of resistance in extreme cases ; and that, in fact, whatever form of government is chosen, and whatever may be the authority with which it is formally invested, people will resist after a certain point, so that there can be no harm in laying down a theory as to the limitations under which resistance is justifiable. As usually happens in such cases, this argument is capable of being turned the other way. De Maistre argues that tyranny is always tempered by the tyrant's fear of assassination, and he seems to regard this circumstance as a sort of answer to the inconveniences which might be alleged against the doctrines of absolutism.

Such is Locke's celebrated view of the nature, the origin, and the powers of government, and it is worth attention, not merely because it was, so to speak, the official justification of the Revolution of 1688, but because that justification was put forward by the principal philosopher of his age. It would be impossible to find in our own history, and difficult to find in the history of any time or country, a case of such

immediate connection between a philosophical theory, what was considered as its political equivalent, and the reduction of both to practice.

The great singularity of the political theory of Locke is its striking incongruity with his metaphysics. The object of the Essay on the Human Understanding is to destroy the doctrine of innate ideas, and to reduce all knowledge to a generalisation of experience. Its moral side consisted principally in the reduction of morality to a system of criminal law with supernatural sanctions. The treatise on Civil Government appears, as the preceding outline of its principal doctrines sufficiently proves, to be the very reverse of all this. It is founded entirely on the two conceptions of the state of nature and the law of nature, and it is difficult to see how Locke could arrive at either of these conceptions from experience, unless his notion of the character of the process by which abstract ideas are to be formed was altogether different from what a student of his Essay on the Understanding would naturally have supposed it to be.

His notion of abstraction is that it consists in selecting from a number of particular things, called by the same name, their characteristic qualities, and omitting what is peculiar to the individual, and not one of its essential qualities—*i.e.* one of the qualities without which it could not perform the functions common to all the members of the class. These characteristics are then combined in one mental image, which is an abstract idea. Now, how can the state

of nature and the law of nature, as above described, be arrived at by any such process as this? We are told, for instance, that in a state of nature all men are equal, that every one has a right to do whatever he pleases which does not hurt his neighbours, and that reason is a law in it. If this is to be regarded as an abstract idea, one would like to know what were the particular cases from which it was abstracted. It is, indeed, perfectly clear that, instead of being an idea of any kind whatever, abstract or otherwise, it is a mere romance, as much the creature of Locke's own fancy as Plato's Republic was of his.

Nor does this arise merely or chiefly from an unfortunate or defective mode of expression. This may be shown by comparing Locke with Hobbes. Hobbes's doctrine of the social contract is no doubt open, as it stands, to the objection that it founds society on a contract, whilst it resolves the obligation to keep contracts into fear of the threats of the organised power of society; but the importance of this objection is greatly diminished by the fact that it is possible to state the substance of Hobbes's views without having resort to the fiction of a contract at all.

For instance, his doctrine of equality rests, not on a gratuitous statement, like that of Locke and Hooker, about all men having equal rights, but on the alleged fact that the mental and bodily powers of individuals differ so little, that the difference may be neglected when human affairs are regarded on the large scale. Though he often expresses it clumsily, Hobbes never loses

sight of the fact, that by a right he means what in a large sense may be called a legal right—that is, some power or faculty secured by an antecedent command, not a quality by reason of the existence of which the command issued. My ‘right’ to my life, according to Hobbes, lies in the fact that God, or that the Leviathan, has commanded others not to kill me. Locke does not explain himself clearly on the subject, but he appears to have regarded the right as separate from, and antecedent to, any command whatever, and as itself determining the command to be issued ; but how he got this idea from experience, and what, however he got it, he regarded as a natural right, he nowhere explains ; and it is indeed impossible for any one to explain.

The same difficulty presents itself, under a slightly different form, in reference to the law of nature, which Locke regards as the law by which the state of nature is regulated. Reason, he tells us, is the law of nature ; yet where and how does reason come by its principles, and what are its principles in this matter ? That men ought to keep their contracts, and that they ought not to hurt each other unless for some greater good, are the sort of principles which Locke regarded as principles of reason, and leading commandments of the law of nature ; but it is difficult to see the propriety of such a view of these maxims.

If experience is our only guide, and if reason is no more than the faculty which enables us to reckon up

its lessons, to set them in order, and to see what upon full examination they amount to, then we cannot set out with these maxims as if they were to interpret experience, but we must first arrive at them from experience; and, in order to do so, such words as 'ought,' or 'are' and 'can' used in the sense of 'ought' (all men *are* equal—no man *can* take away his own life, etc.), are the very first to which it is necessary to attach a distinct meaning.

Locke does, in fact, avoid, or appear to avoid, this difficulty, to a certain extent at least, by the manner in which he makes all his political theories depend upon the Divine attributes. At the very beginning of the treatise, we learn that, 'men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker,' etc., we must suppose this and that; but this only puts the difficulty a step farther off. It is poor logic to argue that Infinite Wisdom commanded a thing because it is right, and that it is right because it is commanded by Infinite Wisdom; yet this is the fallacy into which Locke falls throughout the whole of this essay.

Several observations arise upon the logical and philosophical imperfections of a treatise, which was not only so celebrated, but of such great practical importance as this. The first is, that it is an illustration of the great truth, that the founders of a powerful school seldom draw the inferences which naturally flow from their principles. Locke's principles, fully carried out in the moral and political sphere, lead to

the result, that the only definite meanings which can be assigned to right and duty are what, in the large sense already specified, must be called legal right and legal duty—powers protected by commands of some sort or other; and also, that the only questions which it is possible to treat with much hope of arriving at a permanently satisfactory conclusion upon moral and political subjects, are questions of fact—questions, that is, as to the consequences which do, in fact, follow from certain courses of conduct.

Political economy is the type of a science arrived at by Locke's method. When fully carried out, as it was by Berkeley, by Hume, and others, this method will enable men to discover how the desire of gain, the desire of happiness, the dislike of pain, and many other passions work upon mankind, and influence their conduct. But nothing but confusion and difficulty is produced by attempts on the part of those who practise it to pass beyond its limits, and to lay down by its aid, as Locke and Warburton afterwards tried to do, systems resting on those very *a priori* principles which it is the characteristic of the method to deny.

Perhaps one of the oddest illustrations of the fanciful character of the results to which Locke's abstract principles led him in relation to civil government, is to be found at the end of the 13th chapter, in which he refers to rotten boroughs, and then observes, 'This strangers stand amazed at, and every one must confess needs a remedy; though most think it hard to

find one, because the constitution of the legislative being the original and supreme act of the society antecedent to all positive laws in it, and depending wholly on the people, no inferior power can alter it; and, therefore, the people, when the legislative is once constituted, having in such a government as we have been speaking of, no power as long as the government stands, this inconvenience is thought incapable of a remedy.'

Locke actually solves this purely imaginary difficulty by resorting to the notion that prerogative ought to set the matter right. 'If the executive, who has the power of convoking the legislative, observing rather the true proportion than fashion of representation, regulates not by old custom, but true reason, the number of members in all places that have a right to be distinctly represented, it cannot be judged to have set up a new legislative, but to have restored the old and true one, and to have rectified the disorders which succession of time had insensibly as well as inevitably introduced.' A theory certainly needed to be built on very firm foundations, if it was to be capable of supporting the conclusion that the King had, and that the Parliament had not, a right to disfranchise Old Sarum.

Probably it was partly by reason of its philosophical defects that this treatise met with such extraordinary success. It expressed, in a form sufficiently abstract to look highly philosophical, the determina-



tion of the great bulk of the English people to have done with the Stuarts, their divine right, and their love for Popery ; and for practical purposes, this was the really important thing. Locke's views, carried out to their full consequences, would have excited extreme alarm and dissent, and would certainly not have tended to produce or to confirm vigorous action. To be practically successful at once, a theory must not be too true.

It is curious, as an indication of the change in the national taste which had been in progress throughout the latter half of the seventeenth century, that Locke's references to the Bible are conceived in altogether a different spirit from those of Hobbes. Locke was one of the most pious of men. Hobbes was far from it, but Hobbes's books, especially the earlier ones, bristle with texts quoted in the true controversial manner, whilst Locke quotes the Bible principally for illustrations on matters of historical fact. He argues often enough from Adam and Eve, and the state of things after the Flood, but, although one would have thought the subject invited it, he nowhere in this treatise goes over all the well-known texts which may be quoted for and against the doctrine of passive obedience. This is a very notable change, and is thoroughly characteristic both of the man and of his age.

## X

### LOCKE ON TOLERATION<sup>1</sup>

IF we measure the importance of a book by the degree in which it expressed the feeling of the time in which it was written, upon a subject of the greatest moment, few works will be entitled to a higher position than Locke's famous *Letters on Toleration*. The first letter—for there are four in all—contains what has become, in the present day, the orthodox faith on the subject. There is hardly a line of the argumentative part of it which would not still express, as concisely and systematically as it is possible to express them, the popular views of the matter. Indeed, if an abstract of it were republished without saying where it came from—in some provincial newspaper, for instance—no one would think that it was anything else than a summary of what the editor himself, and all his predecessors for generations before him, had been continually saying on the same

<sup>1</sup> *Four Letters on Toleration*. By John Locke. (Vol. VI. of Trade Edition of Locke's Works.)

τόπιον. This, in a sense, is high praise, for it is not every one who is able so exactly to hit the popular feeling of his own, and of subsequent ages, as to succeed in writing what will serve many generations as a commonplace. On the other hand, it is difficult not to feel that commonplaces are commonplaces, even if they do last for a couple of centuries, and that there is something not altogether creditable to the reputation of a philosopher, in the fact that he succeeded in inventing and perpetuating such commonplaces. These considerations give a good deal of interest to Locke's *Letters on Toleration*; but behind them lie the questions, Are they true? Do they really settle the question which they discuss, as fully as, from their success, they would appear at first sight to have settled it?

With respect to the Letters themselves, we doubt whether many people in the present day read them, and we could not conscientiously advise any one to take the trouble of doing so, who had not some special reason for examining Locke's writings. The first Letter is short, and comparatively interesting, but the second is longer; the third is terribly long, filling three hundred octavo pages; and the fourth, which is fragmentary, and is not published in the folio editions of Locke, is a continuation of the third Letter after an interval of twelve years, and was left by the author in an incomplete state.

Moreover, the second and third Letters belong to one of the dreariest of all departments of literature.

They are answers written in the old controversial style to an antagonist who, to judge from the quotations which Locke gives from his letters, was not in the least degree worth answering. The unfortunate author in question appears to have been of opinion, that persecution was a very bad thing, but that 'moderate penal laws' with 'convenient penalties' were highly useful, not as punishments to men for not believing in the true religion, but as practical inducements to them to give a full consideration to its precepts and doctrines, the end of which would of course be that they would embrace it.

It was easy enough for Locke to show that a person who held such a view as this occupied a contemptible position; but, to tell the truth, his triumph becomes after a time exceedingly monotonous, and the eternal jangle of 'I did not say what you say that I said,' and 'If you mean this, then I say that; but if you mean that, then I say this,' becomes after a while insufferably tiresome. Controversial pitched battles are, as a rule, terribly dull and uninteresting reading when they are in the least degree personal. The attack and defence of a doctrine, which has sufficient interest and plausibility to be worthy of a full statement and an artistic demolition, is often interesting; but a personal dispute about the merits of a particular book or pamphlet is, of all forms of literature, the most repulsive. There is hardly a redeeming passage in the third Letter on Toleration. It is all skirmishing and refutation from

beginning to end ; the subject itself is lost sight of in the continual confusion of quotations and dissections of quotations.

The first of the three Letters is the really interesting part of the work, and it is worth while to give some account of its principal points, because there can be no better text for an inquiry into one of the most curious and instructive of all political problems, practical or theoretical. Toleration, Locke tells us, he regards as 'the chief characteristical mark of the true Church.' He says that he cannot believe that those who are careless of their own salvation should care for the salvation of others, and that it is impossible to think that those who 'persecute, torment, destroy, and kill other men upon pretence of religion,' 'do it out of friendship and kindness towards them'; or that men who do not punish immorality, which is beyond all question opposed to every view of religious belief, are actuated by a pure regard for religious belief when they do their best to extirpate particular sects.

Such being the general spirit in which he is disposed to regard persecution, Locke proceeds to justify his aversion to it by laying down the theory by which it is, in his view, condemned. He does this very shortly and distinctly, and in a manner which, as we have already observed, settled the commonplaces on the subject effectually for a long time. 'I esteem it' (he says) 'above all things necessary to distinguish exactly the business of civil

government from that of religion, and to settle the just bounds that lie between the one and the other. . . . The commonwealth seems to me to be a society of men constituted only for the procuring, preserving, and advancing their own civil interests. Civil interests I call life, liberty, health, and indolency of body ; and the possession of outward things, such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like.'

The power of the civil magistrate 'neither can nor ought in any manner to be extended to the salvation of souls,' for three reasons: First, because the care of souls is 'not committed to the civil magistrate any more than to other men.' It is not committed to him either by God, or by the social contract. Secondly, 'The care of souls cannot belong to the civil magistrate because his power consists only in outward force ; but true and saving religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind, without which nothing can be acceptable to God.' Thirdly, magistrates differ, and, 'there being but one truth, one way to heaven, what hope is there that more men would be led into it if they had no rule but the religion of the Court?'

The magistrate, therefore, cannot lawfully persecute ; but can the Church do so ? 'A Church I take to be a voluntary society of men joining themselves together of their own accord, in order to the public worshipping of God, in such manner as they judge acceptable to him and effectual to the salvation of their souls.' All discipline ought to tend to public

worship, and ‘by means thereof the acquisition of eternal life. All discipline ought, therefore, to tend to that end, and all ecclesiastical laws to be thereunto confined. Nothing ought nor can be transacted in this society relating to the possession of civil and worldly goods.’ The only exceptions to this general rule of toleration are the cases of persons who hold ‘opinions contrary to human society or to those moral rules which are necessary to the preservation of civil society’; of Churches which are ‘constituted upon such a bottom that all those who enter into them do thereby *ipso facto* deliver themselves up to the protection and service of a foreign prince’; and, lastly, of atheists, because ‘promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bond of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist.’

This is the substance of Locke’s first Letter on Toleration, and, if we strike out the exceptions, it would not be easy to give in a few words a better sketch of the views which, at the present day, are most widely popular upon the subject. They are identical with the theory which the French are constantly in the habit of putting forward, in rather finer words, about the separation between the temporal and spiritual powers. Lord Macaulay added hardly anything to them in his review of Mr. Gladstone; and Warburton takes Locke’s *Letters on Toleration* as the foundation of his own treatise on the Alliance between the Church and the State. Notwithstanding all the popularity of which this is but a very slight speci-

men, it appears to us that the theory in question is unsatisfactory.

The first objection to it applies to the method on which it proceeds, which is to form a notion as to what a State ought to be, and then to make that notion the criterion by which you are to judge of the duties and functions of existing States. Locke's plan, in fact, would appear to have been, to form in his own mind a scheme which appeared to him to be advantageous for the States with which he was acquainted, to take that as the model of a State, and then to condemn everything which diverged from it, on the ground that it was not agreeable to the law of nature. His whole theory, if fairly examined, is little more than a continued repetition of one thought in a variety of different forms of words; which thought is, that the Church and the State are independent societies, having perfectly distinct objects in view, each of which is to be attained by the use of means altogether unfit for the attainment of the other.

Why the Church and the State should thus be regarded is a question which he does not answer; and if his letters are contrasted with such a book, for instance, as Bossuet's *Politique tirée de l'Écriture Sainte*, the only result is that Locke takes one view of the matter and Bossuet another, while neither gives his readers the means of ascertaining which of the two is right. The truth appears to be that the problem to be solved is misconceived by writers like Locke. It is lost labour to attempt to form an abstract idea of a State



by the process of taking such parts of existing institutions as you happen to like, and rejecting those which you happen to dislike, and then using the result as a model. The only soluble problem is, What, as a fact, are, and have been, the effects of such and such institutions, and are those effects good or bad?

Moreover, in order to solve a problem of this sort, it is not enough to measure every institution by your own standard of what is useful or desirable. It is necessary to go further—to enter into the ideas and designs of those who founded the institutions which you are going to criticise, and to see what in the long run was the sort of result at which they aimed, and which they ultimately succeeded in bringing out. To say that, in point of fact, civil governments were all instituted for the preservation of property in the wide sense of the word, and that Churches are all voluntary societies for devotional purposes, is to say what is not true.

What civil governments were instituted for, and whether for any specific purpose at all or not, is a question which, for want of distinct information, it is now impossible to answer; but nothing can be more obvious than that, from the very first commencement of such Governments as those of which history gives us any record at all, we find them applied to purposes of a much wider kind, regarded with feelings, and demanding and receiving sacrifices, which are by no means consistent with the view that they existed merely or principally for police purposes.

To take a trite example, let any one read the funeral oration of Pericles, and ask himself whether it is conceivable that he, and the other citizens of Athens, regarded their city in the light in which, according to Locke's view, they ought to have regarded it. It is perfectly clear that no such theory ever entered their heads. The Athenian was to Athens what a member is to the body. He derived from his city, not merely protection for his property, but his whole moral, social, political, and religious education. It was the sphere in which he lived and moved and had his being; and the same is true even in a stronger sense of the Roman citizen and the city of Rome.

So, again, to speak of the Christian Church of the Middle Ages as a voluntary association for the purposes of religious worship and of getting to heaven, is to pervert all history. The mediæval Church was anything but a voluntary association. It was the most remarkable, and probably the most powerful, organisation that ever existed in this world, making, and in case of need enforcing, claims to obedience upon all moral and religious questions, from all persons whatever, with a degree of vigour which no other institution ever displayed. It was of course open to Locke to say that the civil governments with which he was acquainted were fit only for police purposes, and that the Churches with which he was acquainted were useful only in so far as they were voluntary associations for purposes of worship, and there is no doubt much to be said for the opinion that Church

and State are, as a fact, continually tending to assume those forms. But it does not follow that Locke's principles can be laid down *a priori*, as if they were eternal truths applicable to all times and countries alike, and that the rules which flow from them can be universally prescribed as being of general and perpetual obligation.

Apart, however, from objections to Locke's method of inquiry, objections suggest themselves to the particular conclusions at which he arrived. One impression which his Letters leave on the mind is unsatisfactory, though it appears hard to blame him for what is certainly a form of honesty. Locke writes throughout, not as if he thought theological differences matters of little importance, but as if he thought them important in the highest degree. He continually insists on the doctrine that there is but one road to heaven, and his whole argument proceeds upon the extreme hardship of preventing people by force from having as good a chance as may be of discovering that road.

Locke's zeal for toleration is much more the zeal of a sectarian in a minority than that of a man who has a low opinion of theological controversy in general. There is an air of illiberality, and something approaching to selfishness, in a great part of his writings on the subject, of which it is not easy to give an idea. He seems to be continually saying, We are all swimming for our lives, and likely enough to be drowned as it is. What can it matter to you

whether I am drowned or not, and why cannot you let me take my chance in my own way, and according to my own judgment?

This, however, is the fault, not of Locke, but of his antagonists. He applied honestly the principle for which they contended. If all religion is resolved into a tremendous system of criminal law, Locke's view of the case is altogether unanswerable. If God Almighty is the head inquisitor and persecutor who burns in everlasting fire every one who does not believe certain doctrines, all subordinate persecution becomes impertinent. If you are convinced that I shall certainly be damned if I do not believe what God has commanded me to believe, you ought to feel that your interference can make no real difference, unless you can prove that you, the persecutor, have a special Divine commission to persecute on behalf of specific well-ascertained doctrines.

In short, all Locke's arguments become, from this point of view, entirely unanswerable as against the civil magistrate; for no civil magistrate ever was so absurd as to claim infallible knowledge on these subjects, in virtue of his magistracy; and if he had done so, the fact that magistrates differ in their religious views as much as private men, would be conclusive against him.

There is, however, one of Locke's arguments which, famous as it is, appears to us to be a fallacy. Persecution, says Locke, secures only outward conformity, and not inward persuasion, and it is inward

persuasion only which can really produce salvation. If, therefore, salvation is the object, why persecute? The answer to this is, I persecute, not for your sake, but for the sake of your children and neighbours. You would be damned as a heretic, at all events. Being persecuted into outward conformity, you will be damned as a hypocrite, and it matters little to you on which charge you are sentenced; but the consequence of persecuting you, will be that your children will be brought up in the truth, and that your neighbours will not be seduced from it. This, however, is only one of Locke's arguments. It is not a link in a chain, and the answer to it does not affect the others.

The true arguments in favour of and against persecution, always appear to us to depend upon a view of religion different from, and wider than, its aspect as a system of supernatural criminal law. If religions are regarded, not merely as collections of propositions to be believed, and of practices to be observed, under pain of supernatural punishment hereafter, but as institutions adapted (be their origin what it may) to exercise over the people by whom they are professed, the deepest and most various of all influences—if, for instance, the Church as it existed in Western Europe in the Middle Ages, was regarded as the great educator and teacher of the whole human race—it was surely the most natural thing in the world to use violence in order to prevent its authority from being questioned, and to maintain its influence undiminished.

If we look at the difference between a Roman Catholic and a Protestant, as displayed either in nations or in individuals, whether in history or in speculation, it is surely not surprising that particular men or nations should vehemently prefer the one or the other type of character. It is quite intelligible that they should say, We will devote our whole lives, and use every energy of mind and body, and every resource of our nature, to plant Romanism, or Protestantism, in our borders, and to secure its power and development there to the utmost limit of time to which we can look forward. Such an object, whether right or wrong, is at least as intelligible as the fervour of attack and defence which was excited by the French Revolution; and there can be no doubt at all that persecution forms the natural outlet for such feelings.

Charles V. and Philip II. did effectually stamp out Protestantism, in various parts of their dominions, especially in Belgium and Spain. The power, as distinguished from the opinions, of the Pope and his clergy was effectually broken in this country, by the legislation of Henry VIII. and Elizabeth. After terrible convulsions, France had its wish, and did emphatically reject Protestantism, at all events in its religious and conservative form. In a word, the great argument for persecution is, that it is in the nature of war, that religions are well worth fighting about, and that the arms used in the warfare are effective. As for the notion that all fighting and all force, except for the protection of person and property, is wrong in itself, it

cannot be maintained for a moment without reducing history to the level of a Newgate Calendar.

The ends of national existence—that is to say, the objects which national existence and the power of making laws are, as a fact, capable of procuring—are far wider than this. They may be described, in a word, as consisting in the development, the exercise, and the exaltation of human nature to the highest pitch of excellence of which it is capable. They embrace in fact, not merely the protection of existing interests, but the increase of human greatness and happiness in all its forms. Conquests like those of Alexander, the establishment of a religion like Christianity, the redistribution of property on principles better adapted to the happiness of the world than those which are recognised at any given moment, and the redistribution of political authority and artificial honours, are all matters which fall within the power of a nation, and of the laws which are the expression of its will; and history is full of cases in which their exercise has conferred enormous and durable benefits on mankind. If this be so, why is the forcible establishment, or the forcible suppression, of a religion to be regarded as a thing always and everywhere abominable and monstrous?

The answer to this—and, as it appears to us, the only answer—is that it is not possible to base the duty of toleration upon any such universal principles as those which are laid down by Locke. It is impossible to say that, under no circumstances, at no time,

and at no place, can it be justifiable to persecute. There may be, and there probably are, races in which the belief of certain facts, a moral sympathy with particular precepts, and enthusiastic admiration for particular persons, run so rapidly into one indistinguishable whole, and identify themselves so closely with principles and practices utterly at variance with the spirit of the national institutions, and with the course which the vast majority of its members wish to run, that it is impossible to tolerate, and necessary either to persecute or be converted.

The alternative, 'Drink or Fight,' is by no means confined to the backwoods of America. There are states of society in which opinion, sentiment, and practice, are so closely and inseparably united, that neutrality and toleration are scarcely possible, and in such cases persecution can hardly be blamed. This, however, must be taken in connection with another principle of the utmost importance and of universal application—the principle, namely, that free inquiry is the great, and indeed almost the only possible guarantee for the truth of any doctrines whatever. Persecution destroys this guarantee, and is therefore unfavourable to any intelligent and real belief in the truth of any creed whatever.

This principle, however, goes a long way. It applies to supernatural as well as to human punishments for religious belief. If God Almighty is regarded as an omnipotent persecutor, and human persecution is repudiated only as superfluous, men



are not much better off than they were before. Toleration may be defended without admitting the moral innocence of religious error. Persecution may be defended without asserting the guilt of religious error ; but the controversy between those who tolerate and those who persecute will never be treated justly except by those who admit its innocence.

What can and ought to be said, with as much emphasis as may from time to time be required, in favour of toleration in our own age of the world, is that the religious questions which agitate Western Europe are perfectly capable of being discussed without violence, and that the use of violence would do unmixed harm, not only to the cause of truth, but also to the development and improvement of the whole character of mankind. None of the religions now in existence amongst us can, with any show of reason, be alleged to be so much better, truer, and more beautiful than all the rest, that it would be worth while to go to the terrible expense in labour, suffering, and heartburning which would be necessary to its establishment by force. On the other hand, all our existing forms of religion have so much good in them that it is highly desirable that they should mutually instruct each other ; and there are besides a vast number of influences of various kinds at work in the world which are not dependent upon religion at all, but to which religious persecution would in all probability be utterly fatal.

These are the real arguments against persecution,

and it appears improbable to the last degree that, now that human society has reached its present condition, their force will ever be diminished, or indeed will ever cease to increase. If this view of the matter be correct, it will follow, that the fault of the ordinary common-places upon the subject of which Locke's Letters are the earliest, and one of the best, summaries, is that they apply to all ages what is true only of an age of high cultivation.

If Locke had limited his argument to his own days, and had avoided the mistake—a mistake, as we have tried to show, which is altogether at variance with the tendency, if not with the express rules, of his own philosophy—of laying down broad *a priori* principles as the justification of particular propositions which in reality have a firm foundation of their own to rest upon, his Letters would have been as true in theory as they undoubtedly were useful in practice. It is, however, quite another question whether they would not have lost as advocacy what they gained as philosophy; and what was wanted there and then certainly was advocacy, and not philosophy. In Locke's days philosophy had still a long road to travel before it could step boldly out of the old leading-strings and swaddling-clothes, and preach its own doctrines in its own words from its own pulpit.

## XI

### THE SCEPTICISM OF BAYLE<sup>1</sup>

THERE are no writers who have been more frequently misunderstood than those who have acquired the reputation of scepticism. A sceptic, properly speaking, is the antithesis to a dogmatist. He is a man who holds that nothing can be positively affirmed on any subject, and who keeps his mind in a state of perpetual doubt on all subjects. It may reasonably be doubted whether, in point of fact, such a person ever existed; but at all events it appears clear that considerable injustice is done by applying such a name to the principal persons to whom it has been applied in modern times.

It is difficult to form an opinion as to the ancient philosophers. We know about Zeno and Pyrrho only by reports which must have passed through almost any number of hands before they fell into their present shape, and there was a sort of simplicity and eager

<sup>1</sup> Bayle's *Dictionary*. Articles — 'Arcesilas,' 'Paulicians,' 'Pyrrho,' 'Zenon,' etc. ; and 'Éclaircissements.'

delight in ingenuity about the early days of speculation, which, in times of great artificial refinement, it is difficult to estimate correctly.

The mere pleasure of going through ingenious processes may have led many people to say much more than they really and practically meant. In modern times the whole tone of philosophy has been far more earnest, and the attempt to arrive at the real truth, or at all events to inquire with a view to real results, has been much more sincere. The long and intimate alliance between theology and philosophy had many evils, but it had the advantage of making speculation a matter of infinitely greater practical importance, and of a much wider practical range, than was the case in the old world. In a state of society in which philosophical views led straight to moral, political, ecclesiastical, and international consequences of the most definite kind, there was much less probability that men should amuse themselves idly with verbal feats of ingenuity, than in those early times in which Hiram and Solomon sent each other riddles, and in which Zeno invented his remarkable puzzles about the impossibility of motion.

The two chief writers who in modern times have earned the title of sceptics are Bayle and Hume. We should feel much more inclined to describe Hume as what would now be called a Positivist; and as to Bayle, though it might be more difficult to say what his own views were, we think that to describe him as a sceptic, in the proper sense of the word, shows con-

siderable want of appreciation both of his character and of the circumstances under which he wrote.

The chief grounds on which his claims to the title rest are some of the articles in his Dictionary, of which we may specially refer to those on Arcesilas, the Paulicians, Pyrrho, and Zeno, and the 'Éclaircissement sur les Manichéens,' published at the end of the whole book. The articles are most remarkable in themselves, and the general question which they raise, as well as the special question what Bayle himself meant by them, is in a variety of ways full of interest.

Bayle's own style is perfectly admirable, and the reader of these, and other articles of the same sort, is certainly apt to be led to one rather sceptical conclusion — the conclusion, namely, that there is hardly anything left to say upon the great controversies which lie at the roots of morals and theology, which has not been said over and over again, and which, in particular, is not to be found in Bayle. For instance, in various places which it would be tiresome to pick out and arrange, Bayle investigates, and balances against each other, nearly all the arguments relating to the great controversy as to Atheism, Deism, and Christianity in its various forms, which have since been urged, and are now being urged, in all parts of Europe to every kind of person.

There is little of any importance in Butler, for instance, on the one hand, or in Voltaire on the other, or in the writings of the other great champions in

the Deistical controversy down to our own time, if we except some of the transcendentalist refinements of more modern days, which is not to be found in Bayle. Whatever he does say he says with a vigour, precision, and perfect absence of any sort of obscurity, which we hardly ever find in controversial writers of our own age, and which, according to our mode of handling such topics, would very probably appear irreverent merely by reason of its plainness.

There is, for instance, a long argument in the article on the Paulicians or Manichees, in which the different theories held by various schools of theologians, as to the origin of evil and the freedom of the will, are criticised with merciless severity; the relative positions in which they put God and man being illustrated, not flippantly or with levity, but with a strangely careful minuteness, by comparing them to those of a mother, who, seeing her daughter's virtue endangered, nevertheless, for one reason or another founded on respect for her free will, altogether refuses to interfere. An imaginary Manichee is introduced proposing these difficulties to Jesuits, Jansenists, Calvinists, and Socinians, in turn, and proposing to each a slightly different modification of his illustration, in order to suit the special theory of the person whom he controverts.

The natural inference drawn from this, which is repeated on all occasions and in a variety of forms, was that Bayle meant to attack all theology, and he was accordingly bitterly reproached with his infidelity.

He replies to the reproach in one of the *éclaircissements* which form a postscript to his book, and takes up with extreme vigour, and at great length, a line which has been taken frequently since his time. This line is, that to pile up mystery above mystery, and to confuse and utterly humiliate human reason, is the best service which can be rendered to the cause of religion, inasmuch as by that course men are prepared to accept submissively any mysteries which may be proposed to their faith.

Montaigne (on whom, oddly enough, Bayle has no article) took the same ground at great length, and since his time it has been occupied by many others whose sincerity is less open to suspicion than Bayle's. It is very hard to believe that Bayle was sincere. His refutations are too trenchant and vigorous to have been written merely to show the weakness of the human mind. They are much better illustrations of its strength. It is indeed obvious enough, to any one who will take the pains to study what he has written, that his real objection was not so much to dogmatism in general, or even to theological dogmatism in particular, as to the strange scholastic system—for strange it now appears to us—in which all the thoughts of his age upon important subjects were wrapped up.

To think of Bayle as a real consistent sceptic is impossible. His Dictionary is in every part a complete answer to such a charge. Every article in it is pointed, precise, full of life, and full of good sense,

and as vigorous in its way of dealing with facts as any piece of literary workmanship in the world. It is only in connection with philosophical and theological speculations that the scepticism with which he is charged appears. On all other topics he is a model of shrewd good sense.

To take one illustration amongst a thousand, nothing can be less sceptical than the appendix, or *éclaircissement* as he calls it, which follows the one relating to the Manichees. It is a defence—excellent in principle, but utterly false in fact—of his Dictionary against the charge of indecency which had been brought against it. Bayle lays down the rules according to which authors ought to deal with certain subjects, with a vigour and precision which no one could exceed; and tries, with far more ingenuity than success, to show that his own practice could be justified by his principles. This is so far from being sceptical that it is the very antithesis of scepticism. It is elaborate ingenious dogmatism applied to a matter of great intricacy. It must, moreover, be observed, that in every ~~part~~ part of his writings Bayle shows unflinching confidence in the canons of reason, and in the resources of his own mind. He argues on all occasions and on all subjects, and thus shows a degree of confidence in the process of reasoning, which no strangeness in the results at which he arrives can prove to be insincere.

By these, amongst other reasons, we are led to the belief that Bayle's scepticism was a mere pretence, intended to cover his disbelief in the theological



systems of his day ; and that his attempts to show how orthodox and holy a thing thorough scepticism is, and how it may be used to support any system of religious belief which involves submission to mysteries, was a mere exercise of insincere, or at best of half-sincere, ingenuity. There was far more excuse for such insincerity in Bayle's days than in our own. If he had not provided himself with some such shield, it is difficult to say what might have been the consequences. An undisguised avowal of his real opinions might have led to imprisonment, or even to death ; for there are remarkable proofs—amongst other places, in Bossuet's writings against the Protestants—that the Protestant ministers, both in England and in Holland, were most eager to persecute the 'libertines,' as the phrase then was ; and Bossuet complacently contrasts the absence of infidelity, or at least the impossibility of avowing it, in France, with its boldness in other countries.

In our own days, however, many writers have really persuaded themselves to believe what Bayle pretended to believe. Men of considerable eminence and ability are to be met with who say—sometimes in so many words, sometimes indirectly—that reason leads to absolute scepticism, that faith is diametrically opposed to it, and that no considerations drawn from the one source can have any reference to the other. There is a dashing swagger, and a pretension to superior wisdom, about this way of speaking which makes it worth while to examine shortly the grounds

on which reason is thus dealt with, and to see whether Bayle—who, if any one, would have succeeded in such a task—really did contrive to show that reason leads, not to truth, but to every sort of contradiction and absurdity. Perhaps the strongest effort which he makes in this direction is to be found in his article on Zeno, which supplies standing illustrations to those who attempt to make reason commit suicide, but which appears to us, and which in our opinion must have appeared to Bayle himself, to be nothing more than an illustration of the fact that a false method of philosophy leads to absurd results, and that knowledge is to be derived, not from the manipulation of words, but from careful arrangement of the evidence of the senses.

It is difficult to give an idea in a few words of the article itself. It is written, as all Bayle's articles are, in the most inconvenient of all possible forms. There is a short text, which fills just forty lines of large type, dispersed in morsels of two or three lines over ~~ten~~ large folio pages. The rest of the pages is filled with double columns of small type in the nature of notes, running from A to I, supplemented by corollaries as long as themselves, and fortified by marginal notes which are often essential to the argument.

The principal features, however, of the article are the illustrations which it gives of Zeno's '*hypothèse de l'acatalepsie ou de l'incompréhensibilité de toutes choses.*' These illustrations exhibit, first, Zeno's famous arguments against motion; next, supple-

mentary arguments to the same effect, which he might have used—and, as Bayle observes, perhaps did use—drawn from the difficulties which may be proposed as to the nature of space, extent, the vacuum and the plenum, the divisibility and indivisibility of matter. Pursuing the subject in another note, Bayle anticipates a great part, perhaps the greater part, of the arguments of Berkeley on the existence of matter, and at last arrives—though in scholastic language, and as if he were reaching an absurd, or at least paradoxical, result—at the general doctrine which is held by all modern philosophers deserving the name, of the relativity of human knowledge.

Speaking of the ‘*Solvitur ambulando*’ by which Diogenes refuted Zeno, he says, ‘*C’est le sophisme que les logiciens appellent *ignorationem elenchi*. C’était sortir de l’état de la question, car ce philosophe ne rejetoit pas le mouvement apparent, il ne nioit pas qu’il ne semble à l’homme qu’il y a du mouvement, mais il soutenoit que réellement rien ne se meut, et il le prouvoit par des raisons très subtiles et tout à fait embarrassantes.*’

This remark, though Bayle hardly seems to have seen it, goes in reality to the root of the whole matter; and if it were properly understood, and its truth generally admitted, would put an end to a great deal of the nonsense which people are in the habit of talking, often with the best intentions, about the mysteries with which we are surrounded on all

sides, and the imbecility of human reason, even in matters of the commonest kind.

In order to make this clear, we will first exhibit in somewhat greater detail a few of Zeno's paradoxes as reported by Bayle, and then state what we conceive to be the true view of the subject, and the real way out of the maze in which such writers attempt to envelop the human mind.

Zeno proved the impossibility of motion by four principal reasons, which Bayle thus restates from Aristotle. First, if an arrow which tends towards a certain place moved, it would be at once at rest and in motion. This is contradictory, therefore it does not move. That it would be at once at rest and in motion is thus proved. At each instant the arrow is in a space equal to itself, and is therefore at rest in that place; for a thing is not in a place from which it is moving, therefore there is no moment at which it moves; and if there were such a moment it would be at once at rest and in motion. This argument rests on two principles. First, a thing cannot be in two places at once. Next, time is not infinitely divisible, for one hour is over before the next begins; but if a moment were infinitely divisible, it would never have passed. Therefore the next never would begin. 'Ceux,' says Bayle with a want of temper unusual in him, 'qui nient cette conséquence doivent être abandonnés ou à leur stupidité, ou à leur mauvaise foi, ou à la force insurmontable de leurs préjugés.' Aristotle was one of these unhappy

persons, for he maintained that time was not indivisible.

The second objection is that, if there were motion, the moving body would pass from place to place ; but that cannot be, because space is infinitely divisible. To this Aristotle replies that space is infinitely divisible only potentially. Bayle calls this answer 'pitiful.' Time, he insists, cannot be infinitely divisible, because it does actually pass. Whereas space is infinitely divisible, because you can always cut a given thing into two parts.

The third objection is only another illustration of the first. It is the old riddle of the hare and the tortoise.

The fourth objection is so odd that we are by no means sure that we understand it. Take a table four yards long. Let two sticks rest on it, each of which is also four yards long. One (A) touches one end of the table. Two yards of the length of the other (B) lie on the other end. A moves till it lies at full length on the table. B does not begin to move till A reaches its extremity, when it begins to move in the opposite direction at the same rate. In half the time during which A has been in motion, A and B lie side by side on the table, covering its whole length. A of course has taken twice as long as B to get into this position. 'Then,' says Bayle, 'two moving bodies pass over the same space at the same rate, and one takes twice as long as the other to do it. Hence two hours or minutes are equal to one.

That the two sticks have passed over equal spaces, at equal rates, in unequal times, is proved thus: A has passed over the whole table, which is four yards long. B has touched the whole of A, which is also four yards long. The unfortunate Aristotle observes that the space passed over by the stick A is measured against the table which is at rest, and that passed over by the stick B is measured against the stick A, which is in motion; but this, says Bayle, does not remove the difficulty, which is, that 'it seems incomprehensible how in the same time a piece of wood can traverse four yards with that side which touches another stick, while it traverses only two, with that side which touches the table.'

To a modern reader the difficulty lies in the fact that Bayle, or any other human being, saw any difficulty at all in it. If the sticks were mathematical points, it would be obvious that they moved over equal spaces in equal time, for, after A had reached B, it would move to the west end of the table in ~~precisely~~ the same time as B moved to the east end; and, ~~taking~~ Bayle's illustration, each point in each stick moves over precisely the same space—namely, two yards, in the same time. The difficulty about the two sides of the stick is as if a man should call it a mystery that, in walking down the Strand, he passed five hundred people on the right hand, and ~~only~~ two hundred and fifty on the left.

It is obvious enough, from other parts of the same article, that Bayle had very indistinct ideas

about motion, for he says in a marginal note to this fourth objection—‘The same difficulty may be made about the small wheels of a coach, which go over as much ground as the large wheels, in the same number of turns on their centre. The same may be said of two wheels, one large and the other small, on the same axle.’ These statements are both false in fact. The small wheel of a coach turns much oftener than the large one, unless it drags, and the small wheel on the same axle passes over less ground. It is difficult to understand how a man who had ever seen a common wheel and axle for drawing water from a well could have fallen into so gross a blunder as this last. The contrivance would be idle and ineffectual unless each point in the rim of the wheel, which is only a continuous lever, passed through a much larger space in each revolution than any point on the rim of the axle.

The first and second objections may easily be shown to be mere ingenious riddles. Time, says Bayle, is not infinitely divisible, but consists of minima called moments. In each moment ~~the~~ the body is at rest in a given space. Unless, therefore, it could be in two places at once, or at rest and in motion at the same moment, it will never get from place to place. This argument is a mere tangle of fallacies. First, the word motion means nothing else than the fact that at one moment the body is in one place, and at each successive moment in a different place a little farther on. Next, if time is divisible into

minima, there is no reason why a body should not be in different places *at once*, or at rest and in motion *at once*, if at once means in one of these minima. The minima, or 'nows,' may be imagined to be of any length. Suppose each 'now' were a quarter of an hour. A man during one 'now' might walk a mile, or be carried fifteen miles in an express train.

The absurdity of the argument may be displayed by stating it in other words. Moving bodies require a certain time to pass from one spot to another, but at each moment they are in a given space. Therefore there is no moment in which they can pass from one space to another. Therefore they do not pass. The whole argument, it is obvious, rests upon the supposition that they do. You assume the existence of motion in order to disprove its existence. Bayle, indeed, attempts to answer this by saying that the argument should be stated otherwise. 'If bodies moved they would require,' etc. But, as ~~he~~ says of Aristotle, we may say of him—this is pitiful. ~~It~~ only puts the difficulty one step farther off. How do you know that, if bodies moved, they would require a certain time to pass through a certain space? Only by seeing them move. The conditional proposition assumes motion just as much as the direct one.

As for the difficulty, that if a body moved it would have to pass over an infinite number of divisions of space, which is impossible except in an infinite time,



the answer is simply that it is not impossible. How do you know that it is impossible for a body to pass over infinite space in a finite time? After more or less wriggling, the real answer must always be because infinite space is very long. Then, if you choose to use 'infinite' to mean very short, the ground of the objection fails. All the puzzles about infinite space and infinite time are founded upon the trick of using 'infinite' sometimes to mean 'too long to be imagined,' and at other times to mean 'too short to be imagined.'

The oddest part of the whole puzzle is, that Bayle declares that Zeno never denied, and could not deny, apparent motion, but only real motion. The clue to the whole maze lies in this. It is obvious, though it certainly is difficult to understand it fully, that Bayle had some strange distinction present to his mind between appearance and reality, and that this pervaded the whole of the philosophy which he delighted to twist into grotesque and impossible shapes. Once fairly grasp the truth that there is no reality except appearance, that words are only signs by which mental pictures are called up, that the correspondence of such images with the external world is what we mean by truth, and that our own assurance of such correspondence is what we mean by knowledge, and all Bayle's subtleties, and indeed all other such riddles, are easily explained.

It may appear mere loss of time to insist upon this, as nobody ever attached the slightest practical importance to such trifles. In fact, many people do

attach great practical importance to them. They use them as an argument in favour of believing absurdities which they dignify by the name of mysteries. Roman Catholics often justify a belief in transubstantiation on such grounds.

The following argument, for instance, was really used in favour of that belief by a man of great learning and remarkable ability. Mathematics, he said, disclose mysteries as profound as transubstantiation, as thus—Let  $a=b$ . Then  $a^2=ab$ . And  $a^2-b^2=ab-b^2$ , or  $(a \times b)(a-b)=(a-b)b$ , or  $a \times b=b$ , or  $2a=a$ , or  $2=1$ . Stripped of its algebraical form, this notable mystery may be thus expressed: Twice nothing is nothing, therefore two equals one. Recall the true nature of words, and the matter becomes perfectly plain. Multiplication means the process of adding groups of magnitudes to each other; but if there are no magnitudes, the process cannot be performed, and thus the phrase ‘twice nothing’ is, in the strict sense of the word, unmeaning. ‘Twice’ does not modify ‘nothing.’ It is like talking of square friendship or circular reverence. In other words ‘2’ and ‘1’ are adjectives, not substantives. The meaning of the above riddle is—‘Nothing’ is the only substantive which can supply a sense to the expressions  $2=1$ , for ‘two nothings’ and ‘one nothing’ are different names for the same thing.

The so-called ‘mysteries’ about space and time admit of an answer which we do not remember to have seen given, and which it may therefore be worth

while to state very shortly. The 'mystery' about space is that, on the one hand, unlimited space cannot be imagined as a whole ; and that, on the other hand, a limitation of all space is equally difficult to imagine. But let us see whether an end to space cannot be described. Suppose a man were carried through space for an enormous distance, and suppose he were suddenly to lose every perception of extent, retaining all his other faculties, and merely recollecting the extended things which he had previously seen, without immediately perceiving any.

This is imaginable ; for if we shut our eyes and lost our sense of touch, and what has been called the muscular sense, it would actually happen. Next, suppose that millions of people making the same journey always met with the same experience ; would it not be correct to say that space ended at the moment when, and at the place where, it was last perceived, that on arriving at that spot the next moment of time was without a corresponding space, and that this was therefore the end of space ? This is a distinct image ; whether or not any fact corresponds to it is another question.

As to the end of time, we have only to imagine all change of every sort at an end, and time would be no more. There would be an 'everlasting now.' It wants little imagination to realise this. Simple as they are, these two illustrations, well considered, would solve all the 'mysteries' about space and time, and reduce the infinite divisibility, or extent, of either

to a bare question of fact, to be decided by experience.

It may be asked, Do you then eliminate all mystery from life? Is it unreasonable to believe anything which we cannot understand? For many reasons it is necessary to give distinct answers to these questions, and the answer in each case must depend on the meaning of the words. If you mean by a mystery, a proposition which contradicts either the senses or the reason, then assuredly all mystery ought to be eliminated from life, for such mysteries are only absurdities under another name. If by a mystery you mean a proposition relating to matters of which we are ignorant, then mystery will never be eliminated from life till men become omniscient.

If, by believing what you cannot understand, you mean, as many people appear to mean, arriving on one set of grounds (which are generally called reason) at the conclusion that the proposition in question is false, and on another set of grounds (which are generally called faith) at the conclusion that it is true, and then resting in the conclusion that it is true, the habit appears to us a most pernicious form of dishonesty.

If, by believing what you cannot understand, you mean believing that a proposition which to you conveys either no meaning, or an apparently false meaning, nevertheless conveys to those who are better instructed than yourself a true and important meaning of which you are ignorant, but towards which, if

you are sufficiently patient and thoughtful, the proposition put before you will be a guide ; then, believing what you do not understand, when proper reasons are assigned for doing so, is one of the greatest acts of wisdom which a man can perform.

## XII

### MANDEVILLE<sup>1</sup>

THOUGH Mandeville was in his day a writer of considerable note, it is probable enough that he is known only by name to the great majority of modern readers. He was a Dutch physician, born in 1670. He afterwards settled in England, and passed the greater part of his life here. His reputation, such as it is, depends upon the works named at the foot of this article.

*The Fable of the Bees* was originally published in 1714, but was first brought out in its present shape in 1723. It excited a good deal of attention, and the publisher was presented by the Grand Jury of Middlesex, as the ringleader of a class of persons who published books and pamphlets ‘almost every week

<sup>1</sup> *The Fable of the Bees; or, Private Vices Public Benefits: with an Essay on Charity and Charity Schools, and a Search into the Nature of Society. Also, a Vindication of the Book from the Aspersions contained in a Presentment of the Grand Jury of Middlesex, and an abusive Letter to Lord C——.* By Bernard Mandeville. London, 1795.

against the sacred articles of our holy religion.' The Grand Jury observed upon this: 'We are justly sensible of the goodness of the Almighty that has preserved us from the plague which has visited our neighbouring nation . . . but how provoking it must be to the Almighty that his mercies and deliverances extended to this nation, and our thanksgiving that was publicly commanded for it, should be attended with such flagrant impiety.'

This led to a vindication of the book which Mandeville published shortly afterwards, and in 1728 he brought out a second part of the work in three dialogues. With the first part, and the Essay on Charity Schools which is appended to it, it forms an octavo volume, which has been several times reprinted, and more than once attacked. The most conspicuous of Mandeville's opponents were William Law (the mystic), Hutcheson, and Bishop Berkeley. He died in 1733, in his sixty-third year.

The minor writers of a period often illustrate, part at least, of its intellectual tendencies, better than those who have a greater reputation. They seize upon special points, they write with less reserve and moderation than men of a higher order, they apply particular principles in a more unsparing manner, and they suggest to their readers, in a broad and naked form, the existence of questions the connection of which with the views of greater writers might not otherwise have been apparent. This is particularly true of Mandeville, whose real claim to notice is,

that he presses to its extreme consequences a moral • paradox, founded upon a narrow view of the philosophy which gave so much of its characteristic colour to the thought of the eighteenth century. He was, or supposed himself to be, a disciple of Hobbes and Locke, and especially of Hobbes; and the interest of his speculations lies in the question whether it is true, that the consequences which he connected with their principles really follow from them or not.

*The Fable of the Bees* is a poem of 433 rather doggerel octosyllabic lines, which sets forth how

A spacious hive, well stocked with bees  
That lived in luxury and ease,

throve as long as vices flourished in it, and wasted away to nothing when it was miraculously made virtuous. The lawyers, the physicians, the clergy, the soldiers, the merchants, all prospered by various forms of cheating—

Thus every part was full of vice,  
Yet the whole mass a Paradise.

Luxury.

Employed a million of the poor,  
And odious pride a million more.

When every one became honest the lawyers were not needed, the physicians were reduced to a handful, most of the shops were shut up. The population dwindled, foreign enemies overpowered the small remainder by numbers, notwithstanding their courage, and at last the whole hive so diminished that the



remnant 'flew into a hollow tree,' being unable any longer to fill their 'vast hive.'

This performance is followed by an inquiry into the origin of moral virtue, a series of remarks on the particular sentiments put forward in the poem, and an essay on Charity Schools, of each of which we will say a few words.

The inquiry into the origin of virtue consists of an analysis of the nature of virtue and vice. Virtue, says Mandeville, is the name of 'every performance by which man, contrary to the impulse of nature, endeavours the benefit of others, or the conquest of his own nature, out of a rational ambition of being good.' Vice is 'everything which, without regard to the public, man commits to gratify any of his appetites.' These names were imposed upon actions of this class by 'lawgivers and other wise men that have laboured for the establishment of society,' and who 'have endeavoured to make the people they were to govern believe that it was more beneficent for everybody to conquer than indulge his appetites, and much better to mind the public than what seemed his private interest.'

These wise men, however, were unable to provide such a sanction as would set their scheme in motion, but after reflection they 'justly concluded that flattery must be the most powerful argument that could be used to human creatures.' They then exalted the dignity of human nature, and 'having by this artful way of flattery insinuated themselves into the hearts

of men, began to instruct them in the notions of honour and shame,' and accordingly 'divided the whole species into two classes—the abject low-minded people,' who cared only for themselves, and the 'lofty high-spirited creatures,' who cared for the public and the dignity of human nature. Thus 'the nearer we search into human nature the more we shall be convinced that the moral virtues are the political offspring which flattery begot upon pride.'

In the notes to *The Fable of the Bees* itself, which follow this inquiry, Mandeville works out in detail the hints which are conveyed in the poem, and labours to prove that all cases of apparent virtue may be resolved into cases of the gratification of pride, or something else which usually goes by the name of vice; and that these vices, as they are called, are the source of all the real grandeur, happiness, and prosperity of a great and magnificent State.

It is difficult to seize the general scope of the argument, but upon examination it will be found to resolve itself into the following propositions: Virtue, in the sense of a habit of acting for the benefit of others, or the conquest of our own nature, contrary to the impulse of nature, does not exist. The notion that it does exist, and that it promotes the happiness and greatness of States, is a useful delusion, propagated by politicians for the purposes of civil government.

Vice, in the sense of the habit of acting without regard to the public, and for the gratification of our

own appetites, is the true source of public happiness and greatness.

Nevertheless, the pretence that virtue, and not vice—using those words in the senses above explained—is always and everywhere to be followed, is essential to the general prosperity, and ought by all means to be maintained by all who care for that prosperity.

Towards the end of the notes on *The Fable of the Bees*, he states his theory pretty shortly. ‘I lay it down as a first principle that in all societies, great or small, it is the duty of every member of it to be good; that virtue ought to be encouraged, vice discountenanced, the laws obeyed, and the transgressors punished. After this I affirm that . . . we shall find that human nature, since the fall of Adam, has always been the same. . . . I never said or imagined that man could not be virtuous as well in a rich and mighty kingdom as in the most pitiful commonwealth; but I own it is my sense that no society can be raised into such a rich and mighty kingdom, or, so raised, subsist in their wealth and power for any considerable time, without the vices of man. . . . When I say that societies cannot be raised to wealth and power, the top of earthly glory, without vices, I do not think that by so saying I bid men be vicious, any more than I bid them be quarrelsome or covetous, when I affirm that the profession of the law could not be maintained in such numbers and splendour if there was not abundance of too selfish and litigious people.’

Further on he says, 'Would you banish fraud and luxury, prevent profaneness and irreligion, and make the generality of the people charitable, good, and virtuous? Break down the printing presses, melt the founts, and burn all the books in the island . . . suffer no volume in private hands but a Bible; knock down foreign trade, prohibit all commerce with strangers, and permit no ships to go to sea that ever will return, beyond fisher boats. Restore to the clergy, the king, and the barons their ancient privileges, prerogatives, and possessions. Build new churches, and convert all the coin you can come at into sacred utensils; erect monasteries and almshouses in abundance, and let no parish be without a charity school. Enact sumptuary laws, and let your youth be inured to hardship; inspire them with the most nice and most refined notions of honour and shame, of friendship, and of heroism, and introduce amongst them a great variety of imaginary rewards. . . . By such pious endeavours . . . the greatest part of the covetous, the discontented, the restless and ambitious villains would leave the land. Vast swarms of cheating knaves would abandon the city. . . . The sinful, overgrown Jerusalem, without famine, war, pestilence, or compulsion, would be emptied in the most easy manner. . . . The happy reformed kingdom would by this means be crowded in no part of it, and everything necessary for the sustenance of man be cheap and abundant,' etc. etc.

We have been obliged to omit a good deal of

sarcasm and other matter to get the solid part of this theory within compass. Compressed in the highest degree, it comes to this. If men really cared for virtue they would live otherwise than they do. What they really like and pursue is pleasure, and that is opposed to virtue. The answer to it, given in the fewest possible words, is that the writer confounds the proposition that prosperity produces vice, with the proposition that vice produces prosperity.

Two observations arise upon this which are sufficient to show the utter folly of Mandeville's speculations, and in particular to disconnect him from the great writers of whom he has sometimes been supposed to be a disciple. The first observation is, that his view of virtue and vice is altogether different from theirs, and is wrong in itself. The second is, that his political economy, his view of the way in which public prosperity may be promoted, is puerile.

Virtue means a habit of acting upon rules which, if universally observed, would produce general happiness. Vice means a habit of acting against those rules. But there is no more necessary connection between virtue, and acting contrary to the impulse of nature, or with a view to self-conquest, than there is between vice, and the gratification of appetite. It may happen, and in point of fact it generally does happen, that there is no opposition between the happiness of the individual and the happiness of the community, or between the present gratification and the future advantage of the individual himself. It is pleasant

to eat one's dinner, and it is also wholesome to do so. It is the general interest of all the letters of the alphabet as well as of A, that A should be healthy, wealthy, and wise.

The necessity for self-denial and self-sacrifice is occasional and exceptional. It must no doubt be provided for when it occurs; but it is possible to conceive a perfectly virtuous man who never in the whole course of his life should have to deny himself in any one particular or to do anything unpleasant. The general practical coincidence between a desire to promote our own interest and a desire to promote the general interest no doubt affords in all cases an opportunity for the remark that there is no such thing in the world as a wish to promote the public interest as an end in itself; but a thousand familiar instances may be given of conduct for which it is impossible to account on purely selfish grounds, and there is obviously no reason why a desire to promote the public welfare should not be as much a real element in human nature as any other desire. Men are continually absorbed in ideal objects, sometimes very absurd ones.

It is a matter of everyday experience that people will utterly forget themselves and their own interests in almost any undertaking—the study of an out-of-the-way corner of science and literature, the exploration of a remote country, or indeed almost anything. Almost every one takes an interest more or less in matters which in no way

affect himself. We are all glad or sorry at this or that victory or defeat, or at the passing or rejection of this or that law, though we may be perfectly conscious all the while that they will not affect our personal interests in any perceptible degree.

How then does the supposition that most men care more or less for the general good—that is, that they are more or less virtuous—contradict the rest of our experience? and how is it inconsistent with the fact that they also care intensely for things directly affecting their own comfort? I may care for others as well as for myself. Mandeville's theory is as absurd as if he had argued that a man could not possibly like mutton because he liked beef better. Indeed, the only persons against whom his sarcasms have any point at all, are those, if any such there be, or ever were, who contend that virtue ought to be the motive of every human action, and that every action done to gratify an individual desire is of necessity vicious. It shows great ignorance of human nature to suppose either that any one thinks thus, or that all the flattery of all the politicians that ever lived could lead any one to suppose that he thought thus.

The second error that runs through every part of *The Fable of the Bees*, and the notes to it, is an error in political economy. Mandeville's whole theory rests on the principle that the wealth of a nation is increased by luxury—that it would be poorer if there were no waste, and if every one were frugal and industrious. This is like saying that the way to

have a cake is to eat it. It is self-evident that if we all worked as hard as we do now, and spent half as much, and invested our savings in reproductive labour, the wealth of the country and its military power and population would be increased beyond all calculation. Nothing but want of available capital, want of confidence, want of honesty, want of industry, and the prevalence of all sorts of wasteful extravagance, prevents us from making every part of the United Kingdom as fruitful as a garden, and making it capable of supporting in plenty perhaps twice its present population. All this, however, is so well established by modern political economy, that it would be mere waste of time to insist upon it.

The notes on *The Fable of the Bees* are followed by an essay on Charity Schools, which is curious as supplying perhaps the first specimen of a way of writing about popular education which prevailed down to our own times, and of which a careful observation may still detect some faint echoes. Education, says Mandeville, would unfit the poor for hard work. It would make them discontented and insubordinate. They are much too well off as it is, and are continually raising their demands. Servants are becoming proud and insolent, and consider themselves the equals if not the superiors of their masters.

This is all commonplace enough, but the peculiarity of Mandeville is the naked way in which he gives his reasons for wishing to see the poor perpetually kept down to the very lowest level, and never allowed to



rise above it. 'In a free nation where slaves are not allowed of, the surest wealth consists in a multitude of laborious poor. To make the society happy, and people easy under the meanest circumstances, it is requisite that great numbers of them should be ignorant as well as poor. Knowledge both enlarges and multiplies our desires, and the fewer things a man wishes for, the more easily his necessities may be supplied.'

Elsewhere he says, 'Abundance of hard and dirty labour is to be done, and coarse living to be complied with. Where shall we find a better nursery for those necessities than the children of the poor? . . . These are truths that are undeniable, yet I know few people will be pleased to have them divulged; what makes them odious is an unreasonable vein of petty reverence for the poor that runs through most multitudes, and more particularly in this nation, and this arises from a mixture of pity, folly, and superstition. It is from a lively sense of this compound that men cannot endure to hear or see anything said or acted against the poor, without considering how just the one or insolent the other. So a beggar must not be beat though he strikes you first. Journeymen tailors go to law with their masters, and are obstinate in a wrong cause, yet they must be pitied; and murmuring weavers must be relieved, and have fifty silly things done to humour them, though in the midst of their poverty they insult their betters, and on all occasions appear to be more prone to make

holiday and riots than they are to working or sobriety.'

A sufficient answer to this may be found in the observation that Mandeville seems to have had no other notion of public prosperity than the power and brilliancy of a small minority, supported by the misery or contented degradation of a mass of slaves. He does not appear to have regarded the happiness and virtue of the most numerous class of society as an object which it was possible to obtain, or which would have been desirable if it had been possible.

Mandeville's *Search into the State of Society* is a repetition and expansion of the argument of *The Fable of the Bees*. Its object is to analyse all that is usually called virtue, into cases of what is usually called vice—courage becomes vanity, good manners hypocrisy, and so on; but the whole gist of the essay lies in two short passages. 'The sociableness of man arises only from these two things—namely, the multiplicity of his desires, and the continual opposition he meets with in his endeavours to gratify them. . . . Neither the friendly qualities and kind affections that are natural to man, nor the real virtues he is capable of acquiring by reason of self-denial, are the foundation of society; but that which we call evil in this world, moral as well as natural, is the grand principle that makes us sociable creatures, the solid basis, the life and support of all trades and employments without exception.'

The second part of *The Fable of the Bees* is thrown

into the form of dialogues, in which the doctrines of the first part are developed by Horatio and Cleomenes. The most remarkable distinctive feature of this part of the case is the attempt which Mandeville makes to give an air of strict orthodoxy to his views. 'Cleomenes,' he tells us in his preface, 'was fully persuaded, not only of the veracity of the Christian religion, but likewise of the severity of its precepts.' He 'believed the Bible to be the word of God without reserve, and was entirely convinced of the mysterious as well as historical truths that are contained in it.' Cleomenes, moreover, 'was of opinion that, of all religious virtues, nothing was more scarce or more difficult to acquire than Christian humility, and that to destroy the possibility of ever attaining it, nothing was so effectual as what is called a gentleman's education.'

The same tone runs through all the dialogues. Orthodoxy and disbelief are in all ages close allies in the opinion of a large class of influential writers. Montaigne, Pascal, Bayle, and many others have shown this temper in different ways, as it is shown in our own days by men who differ from each other as widely as Mr. Mansel and Dr. Newman.

Mandeville's peculiar variety of that way of thinking may be thrown into the following propositions:—

Christian virtue is different in kind from worldly morality, and stands on its own foundation.

The facts on which the Christian history of the fall and redemption of man stands differ generically from other facts, and stand on their own foundations.

If Christian morals prevailed in practice, the world would be either a monastery or a garden of Eden—a place destitute of all science, art, and trade.

Worldly morality is only vice in disguise. The play of the vices of men against each other produces splendour, wealth, and knowledge—the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life.

Of course this admits of being put into a highly orthodox shape, and of being backed up with every sort of theological argument; but it is impossible to read the book without feeling that Mandeville did not really believe one word of what he said about the divinity of Christianity, though there are here and there passages which look almost as if he had talked and written himself into a sort of sincerity on the subject, or at least into unconscious insincerity. The matter, however, is not worth minute examination, for though the style has considerable merit in regard to force and simplicity, Mandeville himself, his theories and his satire, are perhaps as disgusting as any productions which have attracted much permanent attention.

Low as is our estimate of Mandeville, there is, we think, something to be learnt from him, for he certainly does raise, in an effective though one-sided and shallow way, one of the great problems of morality. He proves triumphantly that it is possible to present cases of what are usually called virtue, as cases of what are usually called vice; and, contemptible as his political economy certainly is, it cannot be

denied that it is difficult to imagine a perfectly innocent world, which would be human, and would not be very stupid. The difficulty, however, lies in seeing how men could be prosperous without being tempted into vice. There is no difficulty in seeing how superhuman strength and prudence might conduce at once to a maximum of happiness and an absence of vice.

On Mandeville's principles, the worse men are, the wiser and happier they ought to be in their collective capacity. What is the solution of this difficulty? How can we reconcile self-sacrifice and self-denial with the doctrine that happiness is the object of morals? Yet, if happiness is not the object of morals, how can we form any scheme of morality, or, having formed one, affirm that in fact any such thing as morality exists?

We will try to throw into a connected form some propositions which collectively furnish a sort of answer to these questions. Their full development, defence, and illustration would require a volume.

Morality is a system of rules affecting human conduct. Some are negative (Do not lie), some positive (Be industrious).

The object which these rules are intended to promote is general happiness.

Acts which conform to them are virtuous, and those which break them are vicious acts.

Men are impelled to act by their passions, which are neither good nor bad in themselves, but which

cause both good and bad actions according to circumstances. All passions cause both good and bad actions. Some (*e.g.* benevolence—the pleasure of pleasing) generally cause good actions; and others (malevolence—the pleasure of hurting) generally cause bad actions; hence they are often called good and bad passions respectively, but this is incorrect.

Men whose passions are so regulated and proportioned, as habitually to cause them to observe or break the rules of morality, are virtuous or vicious men respectively.

The habitual practice of the positive and negative rules of morality tends to produce a cast of character which is called, emphatically, virtue or goodness. A man who made the attainment of this cast of character the object of his whole life, would be an ideally virtuous man when it was attained.

The necessity for self-control and self-sacrifice arises from the fact that human passions are so arranged that, in order to gratify some, others must be disappointed. Those which are popularly, but incorrectly, called bad passions, give more frequent occasion for the exercise of self-control and self-sacrifice, than those which are popularly called good passions (*e.g.* the love of sensual pleasure, as compared with benevolence). As all acts are caused by some passion or other, acts are not bad because they gratify passion, or good because they disappoint passion. Almost all acts gratify some passions and

disappoint others; (giving charity gratifies benevolence and disappoints love of money).

The question why moral rules should be observed, and why virtue should be sought, is independent of these principles.

So is the question, How we may know in what virtue and morality consist.

So is the question, How we do, in fact, think and feel towards virtuous and vicious men or acts, and how we ought to think and feel towards them—*i.e.* what way of thinking and feeling towards them would contribute to the general advantage.

It is obvious that, if these principles are at all like the truth, the whole of Mandeville's views are one-sided, incoherent, and altogether false and partial.

### XIII

## VOLTAIRE AS A THEOLOGIAN, MORALIST, AND METAPHYSICIAN<sup>1</sup>

### 1. VOLTAIRE'S THEOLOGY

VOLTAIRE has perhaps earned a greater amount of fame amongst those who have never read a line of his works, than any other author of modern times, yet the number of his readers is probably diminishing, and it is hardly likely that they should ever increase.

His poetry was never likely to be pleasing to foreigners. His history has been superseded by later and more elaborate investigations, though we do not think that either the *Essai sur les Mœurs* or the *Siècle de Louis Quatorze* has been replaced by works of equal merit. His contributions to physical philosophy were rather those of a propagandist than those of a discoverer, and though historically important, were intrinsically of little value. His personal con-

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres Complètes de Voltaire*. 12 vols. Vols. 6, 7, 8. Paris, 1817.



nection with an infinite variety of remarkable men in every class of life gives much interest to his correspondence, but it requires great collateral knowledge of a subject of which very little is known, even to the majority of educated men—the detailed history of the eighteenth century—to appreciate their value.

If he had written nothing besides all this, if he had been nothing more than an historian, a poet, a reformer in physical science, and the correspondent of a variety of remarkable people, he would never have acquired the immense and questionable reputation which surrounds his name. The thing by which Voltaire is distinguished from other men, the performance which has marked him out from all the rest of the world, and has invested his name with a celebrity altogether peculiar to itself, is no doubt his bitter, enduring, and systematic attack upon Christianity.

Of the intellectual enemies with whom Christianity had to deal in its infancy we know little or nothing. We know of the writings of Celsus and Julian just as much as Origen and Cyril have chosen to tell us, and no more. The rest of their works have altogether perished. No man ever has heard, or ever will hear, what the Pharisees and Pontius Pilate had to say for themselves. The victory of Christianity over its antagonists was only too complete; for in order to be sure that a controversy has reached its proper termination, it is essentially necessary to know what was said on both sides. So long as one side

only can be heard, you can never be quite sure that you fully understand the case at issue.

Till the days of Voltaire Christianity had never been attacked openly, avowedly, and on anything like equal terms, in Western Europe. Montaigne, Bayle, and some other writers of the same kind veiled their hostility to Christianity by an assumed modesty as to the different functions of reason and faith, or by seeking, as Hobbes did, to rationalise it. The English Deists in the early part of the eighteenth century introduced a different mode of attack, of which Voltaire is the great representative. Its specific characteristic is downright, uncompromising, bitter hostility, arising from heartfelt dislike and dissent. Voltaire was no mere speculator or philosopher. He was, above all things, a controversialist, a propagandist, a man who had an immediate practical object in what he wrote.

A few lines in Condorcet's life of him—one of the most unsatisfactory accounts of a great man, by the way, that ever pretended to be a biography—set his feelings on this point in a sufficiently striking light. 'His zeal against a religion which he regarded as the cause of the fanaticism which has desolated Europe since its birth, of the superstition which had brutalised it, and as the source of the mischief which these enemies of human nature still continued to do, seemed to double his activity and his forces. "I am tired," he said one day, "of hearing it repeated that twelve men were enough to establish Christianity.

I want to show them that one will be enough to destroy it.”’

That such was his object, and that he did in fact exhaust the resources of his genius upon it for many years, with effects of which we are still far from having seen the end, is sufficiently notorious, but we doubt whether the particular nature of the means by which he tried to effect his object is nearly so well known. The works of which the titles at least are in every one's mouth are far from expressing such sentiments. They are not to be found in the best known of his plays or histories. They form a separate class of his voluminous writings, and are included under the two heads of philosophy and literature, which in one of the most manageable editions of his works fill three volumes containing respectively 1602, 1828, and 1708 octavo pages, containing fifty lines to the page, and printed in small type. Of course many other matters besides his attacks on Christianity are included in this ample section of his works. Without professing to have read the whole of the 5000 and odd pages in question, we will try to give some account of the general nature of their theological, metaphysical, and moral doctrines, and of the style and temper in which they are written.

The following is a rough classification of his principal works on these subjects. The largest by far, and the one of which the title is most generally known, is the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, which in the edition already referred to fills very nearly the whole

of a volume of 1828 pages. In a commoner edition it fills four ordinary octavos. It is a collection of speculations upon every conceivable subject, beginning with an article on the Alphabet, and ending with one on Zoroaster. Part of it was left in manuscript at the author's death. Other parts were published in his lifetime in various forms. The original title of the most important work so published was *Questions à des Amateurs sur l'Encyclopédie*.

Next in size to this, is the book called *Examen important de Lord Bolingbroke*, which professes to be an abstract 'of the most eloquent, the most profound, the deepest, and the strongest book yet written against fanaticism.' The preface goes on to say that 'this *précis* of the doctrines of Lord Bolingbroke, which are collected at large in the six volumes of his posthumous works, was addressed by him, a few years before his death, to Lord Cornbury. This edition is much larger than the first. We have collated it with the MS.' To this the editors of the Kehl edition of Voltaire append a note: 'On peut croire que tout cela est supposé, ainsi que la date de 1736. L'ouvrage est de 1767, temps où l'on ne pouvait encore défendre la cause de l'humanité contre le fanatisme qu'avec beaucoup de précaution.' This is worth notice, because almost every one of Voltaire's religious or anti-religious works is written under some false name or other. The book is a very rapid and condensed sketch of the rise of Judaism and of Christianity as Voltaire conceived of them.

There are besides a smaller essay called *Dieu et les Hommes*, and a *Histoire de l'Établissement du Christianisme*. Some notes on the different books of the Bible and on the apocryphal Gospels may also be referred to this division of Voltaire's works.

The rest of his writings on religion are to the last degree fragmentary, and are all short, although their aggregate bulk is enormous. One large division of them is composed of dialogues and conversations, which fill a thin octavo volume, and discuss all manner of moral and religious subjects. They are thirty-one in number, two being more elaborate than the rest. Of these, one set is called *L'A, B, C*, and is supposed to be a translation from the English; indeed one of the interlocutors is English, and many of his opinions are, no doubt, intended to represent those which Voltaire regarded as characteristic of this country. The other is a dialogue between Euhemerus and Callicrates, two Syracusan philosophers of the age of Alexander.

There are besides a great number of isolated tracts, of which the following are a few of the more remarkable: *Traité de Métaphysique*, addressed to the Marquise du Chatelet, a very short treatise, for it fills only thirty-four pages; *Le Philosophe Ignorant*, which is something of the same kind, and of much the same length, though written forty years afterwards; *Il faut prendre un Parti, ou le Principe d'Action*, which goes again over the same ground; a criticism on Pascal; a tract called *Les Questions de Zapata*. It

would, however, be endless to give the names of them all.

Besides the writings which treat avowedly of the great moral and religious questions which he discussed so sedulously, novels were a wonderful instrument of propagandism in Voltaire's hands. It is almost superfluous to give the names of some of them. Every one has read *Candide*, *Zadig*, *L'Ingénu*, and *Micromégas*, though some of the others are less well known. The curious *Histoire de Jenni* (Johnny) is remarkable for giving in a condensed form, and perhaps for the fiftieth time, a summary of Voltaire's conception of things human and divine, which on this occasion is fathered on Sherlock, from whom the novel is said to be translated.

Condorcet's life of Voltaire contains a characteristic remark on these books, which shows, among other things, how profoundly practical Voltaire's object was in all that he wrote, and how keenly he was sensible to the pleasure of propagating his views even amongst those who were far from being able to appreciate them. 'Few books of philosophy are more useful [than novels]; they are read by frivolous people, who are alarmed or repelled by the bare name of a philosopher, and whom nevertheless it is important to snatch from prejudices, and to set against the large number of persons interested in their defence. The human race would be condemned to eternal errors if, in order to set it free from prejudice, it was necessary for it to study and meditate the proofs of truth. Happily

natural justness of spirit is sufficient for simple truths, which are also the most necessary. It is enough, then, to find a means of fixing the attention of idle people, and especially of engraving these truths in their memory. This is the great use of philosophical romances.'

To attempt anything like a detailed criticism of these works would be not *only* an endless, but a useless task. They repeat the same things over and over again, with so much persistency, and such an inexhaustible variety of phrase and illustration, that the pith of their common teaching on most points of any importance may be extracted with comparatively little trouble from any one of them.

For instance, Voltaire's view of the nature of the soul is set out in the following amongst other places in his works: 1. *Traité de Métaphysique*, ch. v. 2. *De l'Âme, par Soranus, Médecin de Trajan*. 3. *Lettres de Memmius à Cicéron*, XIII.-XV. 4. *Il faut prendre un Parti*, X.-XII. 5. *Lucrétius et Posidonius, Dialogue II*. 6. *Cusu et Kou, Dial. III*. 7. *Sophronimus et Adelos*. 8. *L'A, B, C, 2d Dialogue*. 9. *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, art. 'Âme,' and many others. 10. *Les Oreilles du Comte Chesterfield*, etc. etc.

In each of these, and in many other parts of his works, the same theory is presented in various forms, but always to the same effect, and often with the same illustrations. This tendency to repeat himself was, no doubt, the natural consequence of the practical character of his undertaking. As the apostle of a

new faith, he was mindful of some, at least, of the apostolic maxims. He was instant in season and out of season. He taught here a little, and there a little, line upon line, and precept upon precept.

His teaching, however, is in substance compact, and if his religious creed, positive and negative, were reduced to the form of propositions, it would have to be thrown into some such form as the following :—

It is morally certain, if it is not actually demonstrated, that there is a God.

There is a conflict of evidence as to the moral character of God, but the evidence in favour of his being just and benevolent preponderates so much, as to render probable any hypothesis which would justify a belief in it.

The belief in a future state of rewards and punishments is such a hypothesis, which is one evidence in favour of its truth. Moreover, it may be said to be physically possible, suggested by facts, highly important if true, and at all events exceedingly useful. It is thus prudent to act on the hypothesis of its truth.

This, in a few words, is the positive side of Voltaire's creed. We do not think that any one who will take the trouble to read his works fairly and candidly, will be able to doubt that it was honestly formed and sincerely held. The negative side of his creed relates to the truth of Christianity, and may without injustice be summed up by saying that he held that the gospel history was a contempt-



ible imposture and falsehood from beginning to end ; that the four gospels as we have them were forgeries, written long after the events which they profess to relate, by persons who knew very little about those events ; that the whole of the Old Testament was a collection of fables ; that the Jews were amongst the most hateful and contemptible of the human race ; that the Bible was full of immoral precepts and of bad examples ; that the establishment of Christianity was procured by fraud and violence, and that it was on the whole a grievous injury to the human race ; that it was the cause of endless bloodshed and violence about trifles, and of a chronic distortion of the moral sentiments ;—in a word, that it was an enemy to human happiness and virtue, and that until it was finally rejected and replaced by Deism, men would never be happy or good.

We cannot of course examine one by one the different items, positive and negative, of this system, but we will try to show concisely what was their place in Voltaire's mind. As to the positive side of his creed, his belief in God, at least in the latter part of his life, rested entirely on the argument from design, which he regarded as equivalent in force to a demonstration. At an earlier period he seems to have attached weight to Clarke's quasigeometrical argument upon the subject, but he afterwards changed his mind about it (compare *Traité de Métaphysique*, ch. ii., with *Le Philosophe Ignorant*, ch. xiii. and following). The following passage gives in a very few words the latest form of

his opinion: 'J'admets cette intelligence suprême sans craindre que jamais on puisse me faire changer d'opinion. Rien n'ébranle en moi cet axiome: tout ouvrage démontre un ouvrier.' He expressed this belief in endless forms, ranging from the most solemn to the most farcical, and he proved the sincerity with which he held it by stating on every occasion, and in the broadest manner, every objection to it of which he could bethink himself; but nevertheless he appears never to have abandoned it, or to have failed to connect it with the other doctrines to which we have referred.

The positive side of his religion, which is restated perhaps on a hundred different occasions, is well and shortly summed up in a tract purporting to be a homily on atheism, and professedly preached to a private society of friends in London in 1763. The following extracts convey the pith of it: 'Let us set bounds to our insatiable and useless curiosity; let us attach ourselves to our true interest. Is the supreme artisan who has made the world and ourselves our master? Is he benevolent? Do we owe him gratitude?'

After answering the first question in the affirmative he goes on to the question of evil. 'Evil deluges the world. What are we to infer from it according to our weak reasonings?'

After discussing and rejecting the alternatives of atheism, manicheism, devil-worship, and optimism, he deals thus with the theory of a future life. 'What side then remains for us to take? Must we not

take that which was embraced in India, Chaldaea, Egypt, Greece, and Rome by all the sages of antiquity, that of believing that God will make us pass from this unhappy life to a better which will be the development of our nature? For, after all, it is clear that we have gone through different sorts of existences already. We existed before a new disposition of organs formed us in the womb, our being was for nine months very different from what it was before—infancy differs from the condition of an embryo, mature age has nothing in common with infancy—death may introduce us to a different form of existence. That is only a hope, cry the poor wretches who feel and reason; you send us back to Pandora's box; evil is real, and hope may be an illusion; misfortune and crime besiege the life which we have, and you speak to us of a life which we have not, which perhaps we shall not have, and of which we have no idea.'

To this he answers, 'We do not know what <sup>b</sup> is which thinks in us, and therefore we cannot know whether this unknown being will not survive our body. It is physically possible that there may be in us an indestructible monad, a hidden flame, a particle of divine fire which exists eternally under a variety of forms. I will not say that this is demonstrated, but without wishing to deceive mankind, one may say that we have as many reasons to believe as to deny the immortality of the thinking being. . . . This ancient and general opinion is perhaps the only one

which can justify Providence. We must recognise a God who rewards and punishes, or recognise none at all. I do not see that there can be a middle way. Either there is no God, or God is just. We have an idea of justice—we, whose intelligence is so limited. Now can this justice be wanting to the supreme intelligence? We feel how absurd it is to say that God is ignorant, weak, or false. Shall we dare to say that he is cruel? It would be better to keep to fatal necessity, it would be better to admit an inevitable destiny, than to believe in a God who had created a single creature to make it wretched.

‘I am told that God’s justice is not ours. I should as soon say that the equality of twice two and four is not the same thing to God and to me. What is true is in my eyes, as it is in his. . . . There are not two ways of being true. The only difference probably is that the supreme intelligence comprehends all truths at once, whilst we drag ourselves slowly towards a few. If there are not two sorts of truth in the same proposition, how can there be two sorts of justice in the same action? We can comprehend the justice of God only by our own idea of justice. It is as thinking beings that we know justice and injustice. God, who thinks infinitely, must be infinitely just. . . . This doctrine seems to be a cry of nature to which all the ancient nations listened. There are amongst all nations, who use their reason, universal opinions which seem to be imprinted by the master of our hearts. Such is the persuasion of

the existence of a God and of his merciful justice, such are the first principles of morality common to the Chinese, to the Indians, and to the Romans, which have never varied, though our globe has been upset a thousand times.'

In order to bring this remarkable quotation within limits, we have been obliged to omit a good many side hits at the Jews for not having amongst them the doctrine of a future life, which interfere with the main argument; but the quotation itself gives in a short compass, what every page of Voltaire's works shows to have been his sincere belief.

It is difficult, for obvious reasons, to give any equally emphatic specimen of the negative side of Voltaire's speculations, but the following passage sums up his theory of Christianity shortly, and in a manner which, considering the nature of the subject, is perhaps not needlessly offensive. It occurs in a dialogue called *Le Dîner du Comte Boulainvilliers*.

'The most probable inference, from the chaos of histories of Jesus written against him by the Jews, and in his favour by the Christians, is that he was a well-meaning Jew, who wished to get influence with the people, like the founders of the Rechabites, the Essenes, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Judaïtes, the Herodians, the Joannists, the Therapeutæ, and so many other single sects set up in Syria, which was the country of fanaticism. It is probable that, like all those who chose to be the heads of sects, he got some women on his side, that several indiscreet dis-

courses against the magistrates escaped him, and that he was cruelly put to death. Whether he was condemned in the reign of Herod the Great, as the Talmudists say, or under Herod the Tetrarch, as some of the gospels say, is of very little importance. It is certain that his disciples were very obscure till they had met some platonists in Alexandria, who supported the dreams of the Galilæans by the dreams of Plato. The common people of those days were mad about demons, evil spirits, obsessions, possessions, and magic, like savages at the present day. Nearly all illnesses were possessions of bad spirits. The Jews from time immemorial had thought of casting out devils with the root *barath* put under the nose of the sick, and by certain words attributed to Solomon. Tobit drove away devils by the smell of a broiled fish. This was the origin of the miracles of which the Galilæans boasted.

‘The Gentiles were fanatical enough to agree that the Galilæans could work these fine miracles, for they thought they could do so themselves. They believed in magic, like the disciples of Jesus. If a certain number of rich people recovered by natural causes, they were sure to declare that they had been cured of the headache by enchantment. They said to the Christians, You have fine secrets, and so have we; you cure by words, so do we; you have no advantage over us.

‘But when the Galilæans, having formed a numerous populace, began to preach against the religion of

the state ; when, after having demanded toleration, they ventured to be intolerant ; when they wished to raise their new fanaticism on the ruins of the old fanaticism, then the priests and the Roman magistrates were horrified at them ; then they suppressed their audacity. What did the Galilæans do ? They forged, as we have seen, a thousand works in their favour ; from being dupes they became cheats, they became forgers, they defended themselves by the most unworthy frauds, not being able to employ other arms, until the time when Constantine, who was made emperor by their money, set their religion on the throne. Then the wretches became sanguinary. I venture to say that, from the Council of Nice to the sedition of the Cevennes, not a single year has passed in which Christianity has not shed blood.'

This extract, short as it is, contains the pith of Voltaire's theory of the history of Christianity. As he says, in another part of the same dialogue, '*L'enthousiasme commence, la fourberie achève. Il en est de la religion comme du jeu. On commence par être dupe, on finit par être fripon.*' It must not be supposed that this general trenchant theory is unsustained by argument. On the contrary, there are to be found in various parts of Voltaire's writings most of the destructive arguments of the modern antagonists of Christianity.

The works both of Strauss and Renan assume to a considerable extent, that Voltaire, and other writers on the same side, in the eighteenth century, got the

best of the controversy in which they were engaged, to the extent, at all events, of disproving the truth of the gospel history. It is needless to describe his arguments at length. They were the standard arguments which always have been, and always will be, raised against the Bible, and which always have been encountered by much the same replies.

Nothing is more remarkable in religious controversy, than the fact that arguments which can scarcely be distinguished from each other, appear to produce a totally different effect, and to have a totally different degree of persuasive power, in different ages of the world. There is, however, undoubtedly a progress of opinion, by which an estimate of the result of controversies comes gradually to be formed amongst competent judges; and after reading volume after volume of objection and reply, all directed to the same points, it is difficult not to indulge a hope, which experience warrants rather better than it may seem to do at first sight, that at last some definite result may be reached, some permanent estimate may be formed of the real value of common arguments, for and against the topics on which men dispute so fiercely.

Be this how it may, it is not our intention to say anything on the merits of this momentous controversy, though we may observe in passing that, wherever the truth may lie, and whatever may be the real importance of Voltaire's objections to Christianity, no one in these days can accept as true



his account of its origin and establishment. Nothing but passionate personal hatred could have induced him to regard such an explanation as the one referred to above as anything approaching to a competent explanation of the facts. That Christianity produced an immense moral change in the world, that this change was, in the main at least, an unspeakable blessing to mankind, and that the same is true not only of the morals, and generally speaking of the dogmatic system of Christianity, but also of its ecclesiastical institutions, are propositions which no one in these days would deny, and least of all those who agree most heartily in Voltaire's negative results.

## 2. VOLTAIRE'S STYLE

In substance, Voltaire's charges against Christianity are identical with those which have been preferred by many other writers, but the style of the attack was peculiarly his own, and has had more to do with the reputation of the attack itself, and with the effect produced by it, than any other circumstance connected with it. Its most striking peculiarity, and that which immediately presents itself to the mind of every one who has even the slightest and most transient acquaintance with Voltaire, is its audacious wit. The 'scoffs' of Voltaire have passed into a sort of proverb. It would be impossible to say how far he really deserved the infamy

with which he has usually been almost overwhelmed on this subject, without going at length into the substantial merits of the controversy.

It is impossible to criticise him fairly on the supposition that he was altogether wrong in the general views of which he made himself the advocate. It is, indeed, often said, that even if he was right, either on the whole, or at all events in a considerable degree, it was nevertheless a grave offence against common decency, and the ordinary and most sacred feelings of mankind, to discuss such subjects in such a tone.

There is a good deal to be said upon this. In the first place, if he was right at all, he was right not merely in renouncing but in hating Christianity, and in seeking by the most effectual practical means to destroy its influence. This was the gist of his anti-Christian writings, and it cannot be doubted that if a doctrine is false, pernicious, and ridiculous in itself, no mode of attack can be so powerful as that of showing it in its true colours. Ridicule is not an unfailing test of truth, but many things are ridiculous, simply because they are not only false but absurdly false.

In so far, then, as Voltaire's ridicule embodied and pointed his arguments, in so far as it was substantially no more than a way of contending that the doctrines which he attacked really were incoherent, incredible, and absurd, the charge which ought to be brought against him is that of mistaking the object of his

attack, not that of attacking in a wrong way. In other words, he is to blame, not for ridiculing what he did not believe, but for not believing what he ought to have believed.

As an instance in which the ridicule embodies a powerful argument we may take a short extract, made as inoffensive as is consistent with showing what we mean, from a strange farce called *Saul and David*, which is printed amongst Voltaire's works, and to which he alludes several times in his correspondence. In two cases he repudiates it with indignation, though in each case he grounds his repudiation on his fear of the consequences of being regarded as the author, but he refers to it twice in his letters to Madame du Deffant (11th October 1763, and 7th August 1769) with a sort of complacency which amounts to a half admission.

The death-bed of David is thus described. '*David*. Ma dernière heure arrive ; il faut faire mon testament et pardonner en bon Juif à tous mes ennemis. Salomon, je vous fais roi juif, souvenez-vous d'être clément et doux ; ne manquez pas, dès que j'aurai les yeux fermés, d'assassiner mon fils Adonias, quand même il embrasserait les cornes de l'autel.

'*Salomon*. Quelle sagesse ! quelle bonté d'âme ! Mon père, je n'y manquerai pas sur ma parole.

'*David*. Voyez-vous ce Joab qui m'a servi dans mes guerres, et à qui je dois ma couronne ? Je vous prie au nom du Seigneur de le faire assassiner aussi, car il a mis du sang dans mes souliers.

'*Joab*. Comment, monstre ! je t'étranglerai de mes mains ; va, va, je ferai bien casser ton testament, et ton Salomon verra quel homme je suis.

'*Salomon*. Est-ce tout, mon chère père ? n'avez-vous plus personne à expédier ?

'*David*. J'ai la mémoire mauvaise : attendez ; il y a encore un certain Seméi qui m'a dit autrefois des sottises ; nous nous raccommodâmes ; je lui jurai par le Dieu vivant que je lui pardonnerais ; il m'a très-bien servi, il est de mon conseil privé ; vous êtes sage, ne manquez pas de le faire tuer en traître.

'*Salomon*. Votre volonté sera exécutée, mon cher père.

'*David*. Va, tu seras le plus sage des rois, et le Seigneur te donnera mille femmes pour récompense. Je me meurs ! Que je t'embrasse encore ! Adieu.'

The point about Adonijah is calumnious, for it does not appear from the Old Testament that David had anything to do with his murder, and the point about Shimei is exaggerated. Moreover, the logical importance of proving that David died in the commission of the most hideous crimes may be contested. If, however, any one wants to be convinced of that fact, it can hardly be doubted that this performance of Voltaire's is calculated to impress it upon him in a manner not likely to be forgotten. By simply repeating in modern language a story to which we had been accustomed in its archaic dress, its moral character is shown more emphatically than it could be by any quantity of argument.

A similar criticism may be made on the whole of *Candide*. It is not, of course, an answer to Leibnitz, but it is a most effectual way of showing that, if true, Leibnitz's theory is of as little practical importance as the question of the existence of matter. You add nothing to our knowledge, and take nothing from our perplexities, by telling us that the world which we see is the best of all possible worlds. Whether I am to complain of the world, or to complain of the nature of things, and the limits of possibility which prevent the world from being any better than it actually is, is in reality a mere question of words, which may be decided by the taste of the person who uses them.

Another observation, which will apply to a good deal of Voltaire's wit, and will more or less excuse a considerable part of it, is that he was obviously one of that very small class of men who are honestly afraid of their own sensibility. He could not persuade himself that he really did believe in anything till he had divested it of every artificial attraction whatever, and reduced it to the very driest, hardest, and most naked residuum to which it was capable of being reduced. Most men like their beliefs, especially upon subjects which concern the strongest and deepest feelings of their nature, to be tenderly used. They do not like to throw their religion, their love, or their enthusiasm, of whatever kind, into dry and harsh forms of speech. They prefer that it should be more or less veiled, and invested with the charms

of mystery. This is utterly repugnant to the feelings of a different class of minds. There are men in whom the intellect is so much more vigorously developed than the other parts of their nature, and who nevertheless feel what they do feel so deeply, that they cannot trust their own sincerity as to any opinion which they may hold, unless, and until, they have tried the experiment of reducing it to the barest and least attractive shape, and have ascertained that, even in that shape, it still appears to them to be true. Something of this temper is to be perceived in several of the great writers of the eighteenth century. Butler, for instance, appears to be continually afraid of being led away by his feelings, and accordingly he never, or hardly ever, gives full swing to them, or allows himself to express his views unreservedly. No one shows this tendency in so marked a form as Voltaire. He carried it to an extent which has surrounded his name, in the estimation of the great mass of mankind, with what approaches to infamy.

After making whatever allowances are due on these heads, it must be owned that a great part of Voltaire's writings is calculated to excite a feeling of disgust, even in those who are not easily shocked. His love for laughter, of whatever kind, and on whatever subjects, sometimes assumes the character of a St. Vitus's dance. He jokes as if he could not help it. For instance, the essay called *Il faut prendre un Parti*, great part of which is written in the most serious tone, begins and ends with buffoonery.

This is the beginning of it—‘Ce n’est pas entre la Russie et la Turquie qu’il s’agit de prendre un parti ; car ces deux Etats feront la paix tôt ou tard sans que je m’en mêle. . . . Je ne prendrai point parti entre les anciens parlements de France et les nouveaux, parce que dans peu d’années il n’en sera plus question, ni entre les anciens et les modernes, parce que ce procès est interminable ; . . . ni entre les opéras bouffons français et les italiens, parce que c’est une affaire de fantaisie. Il ne s’agit ici que d’une petite bagatelle, de savoir s’il y a un Dieu ; et c’est ce que je vais examiner très-sérieusement et de très-bonne foi, car cela m’intéresse et vous aussi.’

The greater part of the discussion which follows, and which is not long, is quiet and decent enough ; but at the close of it a variety of different characters—an Atheist, a Pagan, a Manichee, a Jew, a Turk, and a Deist—are introduced, each of whom delivers a more or less burlesque oration. At last a citizen exhorts them all to live in peace, in a speech of which the following few lines are a favourable specimen. ‘Nous exhortons les primitifs nommés quakers à marier leurs fils aux filles des théistes nommés sociniens, attendu que ces demoiselles étant presque toutes filles des prêtres, sont très-pauvres. Non-seulement ce sera une fort bonne action devant Dieu et devant les hommes, mais ces mariages produiront une nouvelle race qui, représentant les premiers temps de l’église chrétienne, sera très-utile au genre humain.’

This is singularly poor fun, considered merely as

fun, and it is impossible to say that it either embodies any argument, good or bad, or that it can be regarded as in any way whatever a test of truth. It is mere impertinence, and has no other tendency than one as bad as Voltaire's most severe critics can assign to it. His writings are full of this indecency, and there can hardly be two opinions about its character, intellectual and moral.

In some of his writings, however, his characteristic tendency to laugh on every possible occasion takes a far more unpleasant form than that of unseasonable impertinence. He is often, as in the *Pucelle*, exceedingly dirty, without any sort of excuse. At times he falls even a step lower. A certain number of his speculations may be charged with that specially revolting form of indecency in which it appears to be the author's object to disgust his readers by throwing in their faces every fact which common decency leads men to keep in the background. Though he is not so foul as Swift, there is still much in Voltaire which recalls Swift's ferocious obscenity. For obvious reasons it is impossible to illustrate this tendency; but we may observe that, whenever he has occasion to discuss the nature of the soul, Voltaire dwells on the difficulty of assigning the moment when it can first be said to exist, in a manner which is positively loathsome, especially when it pleases him to set it off with a grin, as it often does.

If, however, it is permitted to give an opinion on the style of Voltaire's polemics as a whole, and apart



from their inexcusable faults and blemishes, we should be inclined to think that there is in the present day more risk of underrating than of overrating his powers of thought. He has been so long held up to execration, as a scoffer and a blasphemer, that people are a little apt to forget how very large a portion of the opinions which they hold universally, and almost unconsciously, were in his time startling novelties, advanced in the teeth of the most vehement opposition.

Since Voltaire's time, and to a great extent under the influence of the movement in which he took the most prominent part, the position of Christianity in the world has greatly changed. The Christianity which we know is a very different thing, and occupies a very different position in human affairs, from the Christianity which he attacked. We are in the habit of regarding Christianity as a religion, a system of belief and a form of worship adopted freely by those who like it, because they like it, and as far as they like it. The object of his hatred was a form of government punishing all who opposed it, forbidding the expression of any opinions hostile to itself, and asserting the right to rule over and control all collateral exertions of the intellect. The practical difference between the two things is enormous; but the more modern conception is so familiar to us, that we are apt to forget the immense importance of the change which has occurred since Voltaire's time, and to underrate the importance of the part which he took in bringing it about.

The established official theory throughout the greater part of Europe, and especially in France, with regard to Christianity, was, in Voltaire's day, that theology was the Queen of the Sciences, and the very foundation of the whole social system on which all legitimate power was founded, and by which all human knowledge and speculation was to be measured and controlled. It was against this claim that Voltaire so energetically rebelled, and it can hardly be denied in good faith that he made good his case, and that though he certainly did not succeed in exploding Christianity as an opinion, or in giving a satisfactory account of it from a philosophical or historical point of view, he did succeed in reducing it to the position of a congeries of analogous systems of opinions, any or all of which may be held within the circle of lay life, but none of which can claim to be its foundation and sovereign.

The difference between the condition of things in which human society is regarded as consisting of many states in one church, and that in which it is regarded as consisting of many states comprising many churches, is enormous. It constitutes nearly the whole difference between the mediæval and the modern world, and may be expressed by saying, that in the one case the Church, and in the other the State, are substantive and adjective respectively. The change from the one condition to the other was no doubt gradual and partial, but Voltaire did more than any single man to bring it about in his own time

and country. There is now no part of Europe in which the ecclesiastical view of things and the political power of the clergy is in any degree comparable to what it was a hundred years ago.

The consideration of what Voltaire did in this matter is the best introduction to the consideration of what he failed to do. He failed altogether to destroy Christianity as a system of belief, and indeed the exaggerated violence and mistaken mode of attack which he adopted, did a good deal towards causing that powerful reaction in its favour, which is still in full progress.

The tacit verdict upon the whole subject of a very large section of those whom he addressed, may be described as being somewhat to the following effect: You have succeeded amply in showing us that no theological system is so true that it can properly be made the basis of lay government. You have also succeeded in bringing out, in a form which, if exaggerated, is certainly forcible and pointed in the highest degree, the standing objections to all theology, and this has had the effect of lowering the tone of all theologians, and of reducing by many degrees, not the fervour of religious feeling, but the distinctness, the force, and the systematic character of religious belief, especially amongst the more cultivated sections of European society, but you have by no means disposed of religion. Your account of Christianity is altogether incredible, besides being obviously as one-sided, as unfair, and in many

respects as inaccurate, as any account of it from the opposite point of view can be. On the whole the result is that, though you, and others like you, have brought about a change in the religious atmosphere of the world, you have left its religious belief unaltered, though weaker. The specific doctrines remain pretty much where they were, though the force of the objections to the whole system, the existence of which, to some extent, has been always admitted by all thinking men, has been increased.

One of the most remarkable effects of Voltaire's influence upon the course of theological thought since his time, is to be found in the immense impulse which the reaction against him has given to the defence of Christianity, on historical and emotional grounds. Although history was in some respects Voltaire's forte, and although the *Essai sur les Mœurs* and the *Siècle de Louis XIV.* are in some respects the best of his works, there can be no doubt that the historical side of his polemical writings is their weakest side.

Many things may be said about Christianity, but it is perfectly obvious that, as a mere question of history, he has not spoken of it with any tolerable recognition of the advantages which it has bestowed on mankind. The principal, it might almost be said the only fact upon which he insists in relation to its history, is the supposed fact that it was the cruel oppressor of the human race, the persecutor of all who dissented from it. This is so false that it is hardly worth while to insist upon its falsehood. Christianity in

his day had been the ruling moral power in this part of the world for about fourteen hundred years, and although it is perfectly true that in the course of that long history many crimes had been committed in connection with the Christian religion, nothing can be more false, than the assertion which he continually makes, that hardly a year had passed in the whole of that time in which Christianity had not shed blood.

Let every one, for instance, look at the history of England from the time when Christianity was first introduced into it till our own times. We have had our full share of bloodshed, but very little of it has had much to do with Christianity. Nothing can be more irrational and unphilosophical, than to set down to the charge of religion every convulsion in which religious questions were indirectly brought into prominence. The Wars of the Roses caused more bloodshed than was ever caused in this country by religion. The religious element in the civil wars of the seventeenth century was only one element of many, and the atrocious ferocity, of which the Irish were alternately the victims and the perpetrators, had more to do with the antagonism between a stronger and a weaker race than with the controversy between rival creeds.

It is, moreover, perfectly obvious to every competent observer that to treat religious controversies with the contempt which Voltaire on all occasions displayed for them, is merely to show ignorance and shallowness. Mankind feel the deepest interest

in religious controversy, because no subject possesses greater or more legitimate interest for them. It is no doubt true that by mixing up philosophy and religion, it often happens that a verbal puzzle is turned into a symbol and battle-cry. But the thing signified may be none the less important because the symbol itself is a barely intelligible subtlety.

To develop these and several other lines of thought, which have now become almost commonplaces, was the most natural and obvious way of answering Voltaire, and much of the historical speculation of the last century has shown the traces of the general desire to do so.

De Maistre was perhaps the first conspicuous protester against his views, and by far the most successful parts of his works are those in which he argues against the thin, shallow, unsympathising view of history which was the natural and almost necessary companion of Voltaire's theology and philosophy. Later efforts in the same direction are too well known to require notice, for it is hardly an exaggeration to say that the distinctive peculiarity of historical research in our own century, has been the continual effort to enter into, and sympathise with, the thoughts and feelings, and especially the religious thoughts and feelings, of past ages of the world.

Voltaire's persistent determination to set aside and to trample upon the mystical emotional side of religion, for this is the true object and meaning of a great proportion of his language on such

topics, has no doubt had a great deal to do with the revival of that side of Christianity of which we have seen so much, and are to see so much more. He has been regarded as a man morally and spiritually blind, because he viewed, as no better than so many delusions, things which others declared themselves to be able to see.

Hardly anything can convey a stronger lesson of the effects of heaping ridicule upon what is usually regarded as sacred than the result of Voltaire's attacks on Christian mysticism. The practical effect of his ridicule has been rather to diminish than to increase the weight of his arguments, except with those who were on his side, apart from them. If he had been calmer and graver, and if he had realised what, as a fact, is the weight and value of religious feelings, and allowed for their existence, whilst he denied that they ought to exist, or were founded on a true perception of facts, his influence would have been much greater in the long run. The late Mr. Cecil, if we are not mistaken, used to say, in reference partly to Voltaire and partly to Gibbon, that the last and most terrible device of Satan, would be the raising up of a really fair and candid antagonist to Christianity, who would state without ridicule or exaggeration the real objections to it. There was a great deal of truth, though it was very oddly expressed, in this curious remark.

There is one point in Voltaire's religious speculations which is frequently overlooked, but which is

not the less important on that account, as it ought in fairness to be owned that a great deal of his influence is due to it. We refer to the genuine, though rather querulous, tone of piety which continually displays itself in various parts of his voluminous speculations, notwithstanding their waywardness, levity, and occasional buffoonery. To be resigned to the will of God is no doubt a great thing, but some degree of faith in the existence and in the goodness of God is shown by feeling aggrieved and injured, as well as merely pained, at the misfortunes of life.

Voltaire did, at all events, believe in his Maker enough to feel morally shocked by the miseries of mankind. There is something, for instance, in his famous poem on the earthquake at Lisbon, very like those parts of the Psalms which protest against the miseries of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked. There is true piety in the following noble lines :—

C'est l'orgueil, dites-vous, l'orgueil séditieux,  
Qui prétend qu'étant mal nous pourrions être mieux.

Je désire humblement, sans offenser mon maître,  
Que ce gouffre enflammé de soufre et de salpêtre  
Eût allumé ses feux dans le fond des déserts.  
Je respecte mon Dieu, mais j'aime l'univers ;  
Quand l'homme ose gémir d'un fléau si terrible,  
Il n'est point orgueilleux, hélas ! il est sensible.

Non, ne me présentez plus à mon cœur agité  
Ces immuables lois de la nécessité,  
Cette chaîne des corps, des esprits et des mondes.



O rêves des savans, ô chimères profondes !  
 Dieu tient en main la chaîne et n'est point enchaîné ;  
 Par son choix bienfaisant tout est déterminé ;  
 Il est libre, il est juste, il n'est point implacable.  
 Pourquoi donc souffrons-nous sous un maître équitable ?  
 Voilà le nœud fatal qu'il fallait délier,  
 Guéririez-vous nos maux en osant les nier ?  
 Ou l'homme est né coupable et l'on punit sa race,  
 Ou ce maître absolu de l'être et de l'espace,  
 Sans courroux, sans pitié, tranquille, indifférent,  
 De ses premiers décrets suit l'éternel torrent :  
 Ou la matière informe à son maître rebelle  
 Porte en soi des défauts nécessaires comme elle,  
 Ou bien Dieu nous éprouve et ce séjour mortel  
 N'est qu'un passage étroit vers un monde éternel.  
 Nous essuyons ici des douleurs passagères,  
 Le trépas est un bien qui finit nos misères,  
 Mais quand nous sortirons de ce passage affreux  
 Qui de nous prétendra mériter d'être heureux ?  
 Quelque parti qu'on prenne on doit frémir sans doute ;  
 Il n'est rien qu'on connaisse, et rien qu'on ne redoute.  
 La nature est muette, on l'interroge en vain ;  
 On a besoin d'un Dieu qui parle au genre humain :  
 Il n'appartient qu'à lui d'expliquer son ouvrage,  
 De consoler le faible et d'éclairer le sage.

UN JOUR TOUT SERA BIEN, voilà notre espérance :  
 TOUT EST BIEN AUJOURD'HUI, voilà l'illusion ;  
 Les sages me trompaient et Dieu seul a raison.  
 Humble dans mes soupirs, soumis dans ma souffrance,  
 Je ne m'élève point contre la Providence.  
 Sur un ton moins lugubre on me vit autrefois  
 Chanter des doux plaisirs les séduisantes lois.  
 D'autres temps d'autres mœurs ; instruit par la vieillesse,  
 Les humains égarés partageant la faiblesse,  
 Dans une épaisse nuit cherchant à m'éclairer,  
 Je ne sais que souffrir et non pas murmurer.

On reading such lines as these, with the conviction

of their entire sincerity, it is difficult not to remember that the bitter complaints and eager remonstrances of Job were more genuine, more pious, and more acceptable than the orthodox theodicies of his pious friends. With all his faults, there was a true vein of piety in the man who could write the lines we have quoted, and with them we will conclude our observations on Voltaire's style.

### 3. VOLTAIRE AS A MORALIST

The interest of Voltaire's theological speculations, and the character of the attack he made on Christianity, depend, to a very great extent—it would be hardly too much to say that they depend principally—on the ethical conclusions which are attached to them; for though it is undoubtedly true that religion and morality may be divorced, and that it is possible to conceive of forms of worship altogether unrelated to morals, yet the great interest of theological speculation, in our own age of the world, lies in its bearing, real or supposed, upon morality.

The great charge always preferred against infidelity, both in the last century and in our own times, is its connection with immorality. Nothing can be more interesting than to consider calmly, and as impartially as may be, the question how far this charge was well founded. It would require much boldness of assertion to profess to be acquainted with all Voltaire's utterances upon any important subject. He treated almost

everything which he had occasion to deal with at all under almost every form ; but the following are the parts of his works from which our notions of his views as to the theory of ethics are taken : *Traité de Métaphysique*, ch. viii. and ix. ; *Le Philosophe Ignorant*, xxxi.-xlvi. ; several of his Dialogues, in particular Dialogue viii. of the volume of Dialogues, and Dialogues iii. iv. xi. and xiii. of the series called *L'A, B, C* ; several articles in the *Philosophical Dictionary* ; and, amongst the poems, the *Discours en vers sur l'Homme* and the *Poème sur la Loi Naturelle*. Besides this, every part of his writings is full of moral reflections of different kinds, which are almost always based substantially on the same principles.

The first observation which suggests itself upon these writings is that Voltaire never appears to have treated the subject of morality at length, or with anything like a full appreciation of its various difficulties and intricacies. It was a sort of necessity of his nature to be provided, on all the subjects which principally interested him, with a theory which admitted of being stated in a short, striking, and emphatic form ; but it was not his way to think out in a systematic manner difficult and intricate subjects. The longest exposition of his ethical views which we have met with is to be found in the *Philosophe Ignorant*, which was written late in life ; but there is also a pretty full statement of them in the latter part of the *Traité de Métaphysique*, written many years before, though not published in his lifetime.

We will begin with the latter. It forms the conclusion of a short treatise on metaphysics, which Voltaire always treats as including theology and ethics. His theory, as stated in this place, is that man is not merely sociable, like other animals, but also naturally benevolent to a certain extent. His benevolence, however, would not be a sufficient foundation for society on any considerable scale. 'Pride is the principal instrument with which this fine edifice of society has been built ;' and he proceeds to point out, exactly in the spirit and almost in the words of Mandeville, how pride was the great spur by which men were prompted to make sacrifices for the common good, 'Il ne fut pas difficile de leur persuader que s'ils faisaient pour le bien commun de la société quelque chose qui leur coûtait un peu de leur bien-être, leur orgueil en serait amplement dédommagé. . . . On distingua donc de bonne heure les hommes en deux classes ; la première les hommes divins qui sacrifient leur amour propre au bien public ; la seconde les misérables qui n'aiment qu'eux-mêmes ; tout le monde voulut et veut être encore de la première classe, quoique tout le monde soit dans le fond du cœur de la seconde.'

Envy was necessary to reinforce pride, and did so effectually. Such are the great working forces of all society. In order that society might get on at all, some kind of laws were necessary, just as all games imply rules. The laws varied in various places ; but everywhere those who obeyed them were

· called virtuous, those who disobeyed, vicious : ‘Therefore’ (he concludes), ‘virtue and vice, moral good and moral evil, are in every country that which is useful or injurious to society ; and in all times and places he who sacrifices most to the public will be called the most virtuous. It appears then that good actions are only actions which are advantageous to us, and crimes actions which injure us. Virtue is the habit of doing things which please men, and vice the habit of doing things which displease them.’

The things which please one man displease another ; still ‘God has given man certain sentiments of which he can never rid himself, and which are the eternal bonds and first laws of the society in which he foresaw that men would live.’

Thus adultery and other sexual crimes are permitted in many nations ; ‘but you will not find one in which it is permitted to break one’s word, for society can subsist between adulterers, but not between people who pride themselves on deceiving each other.’

To ask whether vice and virtue are purely relative to mankind, is as absurd as to ask whether heat and cold, bitter and sweet, are relative to mankind. Moral good and evil are relative to us as much as pain and pleasure. God has not carried his views for men beyond the point of providing them with instincts and passions, the play of which would form society. He has established no laws at all, and no morality. ‘Laws and morals are human devices for human convenience. If any one says, ‘My happiness

consists in preying on society, in killing, robbing, or libelling, and therefore on your theory I can do as I please,' 'Je n'ai autre chose à dire à ces gens-là sinon que probablement ils seront pendus.'

It is highly probable that the crimes committed here on earth in no way interest the Deity. 'God has put men and animals on the earth, and it is for them to conduct themselves as well as they can. Woe betide the flies which fall into the spiders' webs!' It is much to be wished that God had given men positive laws, but as this is not the case we must do as well as we can; and if any one will 'abandon himself unreservedly to the fury of his unbridled desires,' we must rely on law and public opinion, on his own pride which cannot bear general contempt, and 'is perhaps the greatest check which nature has laid on human injustice,' and, above all, 'on the universal sentiment called honour, of which the most corrupt cannot rid themselves, and which is the pivot of society,' to keep him in order.

In his later works on the same subject, and especially in the *Philosophe Ignorant*, he dwells rather on the universality of morality than on the other topics just mentioned. He goes to the edge of saying that morality is innate and instinctive. 'La notion de quelque chose de juste me semble si naturelle, si universellement acquise par tous les hommes, qu'elle est indépendante de toute loi, de tout parti, de toute religion. . . . L'idée de justice me paraît tellement une vérité du premier ordre à laquelle tout l'univers

donne son assentiment que les plus grands crimes qui affligent la société humaine sont tous commis sous un faux prétexte de justice.'

He further says, 'Je crois que les idées du juste et de l'injuste sont aussi claires, aussi universelles que les idées de santé et de maladie, de vérité et de fausseté, de convenance et de disconvenance.

It is difficult, no doubt, to define the limits of what is and what is not just, yet the things themselves are perfectly distinct and clear. 'Ce sont des nuances qui se mêlent, mais les couleurs tranchantes frappent tous les yeux.' So decided was Voltaire on this point that he went to the length (a very unusual length with him) of contradicting Locke upon it. Locke dwells, and certainly with some exaggeration, on the moral differences between different nations and ages, in order to attack the notion that we have innate practical principles of a moral kind. Voltaire argues that we have no innate practical principles, but he says, 'Au lieu de ces idées innées chimériques, Dieu nous a donné une raison qui se fortifie avec l'âge, et qui nous apprend à tous quand nous sommes attentifs, sans passion, sans présage, qu'il y a un Dieu, et qu'il faut être juste.'

From Locke he passes to Hobbes, and observes, 'C'est en vain que tu étonnes tes lecteurs en réussissant presque à leur prouver qu'il n'y a aucune loi dans le monde que des lois de convention; qu'il n'y a de juste et d'injuste que ce qu'on est convenu d'appeler tel dans un pays.'

It would, he says, be as unjust to murder a man in a desert island as to murder him in England. He charges Hobbes with confounding power and right, and concludes, 'Quiconque étudie la morale doit commencer à réfuter ton livre dans ton cœur ; mais ton propre cœur te réfutait encore davantage ; car tu fus vertueux ainsi que Spinoza,' etc.

Voltaire, as we have already observed, refers to ethical questions in other parts of his works, but, so far as we are aware, the passages just quoted give a fair view of his most characteristic opinions upon them, and there would be little use in adding to their number.

The poem *Sur la Loi Naturelle* is to precisely the same effect as the passages in the *Philosophe Ignorant*, though it brings forward the fact of conscience somewhat more fully.

The poem called *Discours en vers sur l'Homme*, which challenges comparison with Pope's *Essay on Man*, and appears to us much inferior to it, concludes with a prolonged denunciation of asceticism which does not occur in the extracts already given ; and the Dialogues only put Voltaire's own views into the mouths of various interlocutors—a conventional savage, for instance, who states them to a theologian, as if they were obvious first truths, transparent to every unsophisticated mind, and a certain Englishman (A) who was the leading personage in the Dialogues called *L'A, B, C*.

It must, however, be observed, that the theory to



be met with in the *Traité de Métaphysique*, which, as we said, considerably resembles Mandeville in part, though not in its full extent, would seem to have made far less impression on Voltaire, and to have occupied a much less important place in his mind, than the theory of the immutability and universality of morality, which is developed in the *Philosophe Ignorant*, and which he never misses an opportunity of stating in various forms and on all possible occasions.

Ethical speculations may generally be tested by seeing how far they answer the three questions—What is the nature of the distinction between moral good and evil? How are particular people in particular cases to know the one from the other? Why should men do good and not evil? Tried by this test we do not think highly of Voltaire's moral speculations, for he does not give a satisfactory answer to any one of these questions, nor, as it appears to us, does he in the least degree appreciate the great difficulties with which each is encumbered; yet there can be no doubt that he ought to have had clear and satisfactory views upon each of them, as the whole gist and point of his attack on all established forms of religion was that they were immoral.

To take these questions in turn. In what does the difference between moral good and moral evil consist? They are, we are told, entirely relative to men. Moral good is that which pleases men, moral evil that which displeases them; virtue is the habit of acting in such

a way as to please, and vice the habit of acting in such a way as to displease them. This may be, and perhaps is, no more than a way of stating the well-known Benthamite proposition about the greatest happiness of the greatest number, though it is not an accurate way of stating it ; but if this is what Voltaire meant—and indeed, upon any hypothesis as to his meaning—it is very difficult to reconcile such a view with the answer which he gives to the second of the three questions suggested above, How am I to know what is right ?

Upon this point he says, over and over again, You are to know by the unanimous consent of mankind, all of whom attach to moral obligations the same meaning and the same importance. Surely no one will assert that all mankind know what courses of conduct will promote the general happiness of mankind, but whoever tries to combine the Benthamite conception of the nature of morality, with the doctrine that positive morality—that is to say, moral rules in fact accepted as such—are universal, notwithstanding superficial variations, must maintain this theory. Utilitarianism does not in terms contradict the theory of a universal instinctive agreement of all mankind on moral subjects. It is imaginable, that all men might instinctively know what courses of conduct would promote the general happiness of the race, just as it is imaginable, that they might instinctively know the differential calculus, but, in fact, there is as little evidence in favour

of the one as there is in favour of the other proposition.

It would be unjust to Voltaire to suppose that this had not struck him. It seems, indeed, that he did appreciate the difficulty which we have pointed out more or less confusedly, and he tried to avoid it by a device which, when examined, appears altogether ineffectual for this purpose. As we have seen, he divides morality into two parts, of which one is universal, whilst the other changes indefinitely at different times and places; almost all positive rules on particular subjects—such, *e.g.*, as the rules which regulate the relation of the sexes—belonging to the variable, and those which enjoin justice or truth in general terms belonging to the constant part, and these general rules, he observes, are far the more important of the two.

To us this appears very like saying that though all the parts of two systems of morality are different, the wholes which are made up of those parts are identical. Justice, in the wide sense of the word in which he generally uses it, cannot be better defined than in the famous words of the Roman law. It is ‘constans et perpetua voluntas suum cuique tribuendi.’ And its leading maxims are ‘honeste vivere, alium non lædere, suum cuique tribuere.’ Now if it be true, as Voltaire says, that different nations at different times have different views as to what constitutes an honourable way of life, or injury to another, and as to what is one’s own property, it will follow

that they mean different things by the word justice, which is only a collective name for the habit of practising all the virtues in question?

If the matter is fully considered, it will appear, we think, that it is not true that any general system of morality is universally recognised amongst men, at all times and in all places, but that, on the contrary, every age and country has its own system or systems differing it may be slightly from each other in practice, but nevertheless constructed upon principles between which there is and always will be a small and irreconcilable discrepancy. For instance, the practical rules which flow from the ascetic and from the social ideal of human life do not in common cases differ very widely in practice; but the colour, so to speak, of the systems is different, and this will be perceived by every one who is at all accustomed to take a broad view of them. We think that Voltaire greatly underrated the importance of these differences, and that the fact that he did so, was one of several reasons which prevented him from appreciating fairly the nature and degree of the resemblances which exist between the moralities of different times and places.

As to the third great branch of morality, the question of sanctions, Voltaire is thoroughly unsatisfactory; he is, indeed, even more unsatisfactory than is usual with writers of his way of thinking. The question of sanctions is the great difficulty of every one who speculates on morality from the purely secular point of view, which, by the way, Voltaire did not. He

says in so many words that he cannot answer the question, Why, if I can keep within the law, should I not be a villain if I please? Bentham avoids the question, though he contributes something to its solution by classifying the sanctions which are capable of being applied to human conduct. Mr. Mill treats it as being a difficulty which applies to all systems alike, which it no doubt is; and Comte and his disciples, as far as we understand their views, fall more or less into the elephant and tortoise difficulty.

Appropriate education and other influences are to erect a new spiritual power, which is to wield almost immeasurable moral power over men's minds. In other words, people are gradually to become good by the power of teaching. Yes, but suppose that they will not? Under the mask of gaiety Voltaire answers this question in the lamest possible way. '*Je n'ai autre chose à dire à ces gens-là*'—the determined and avowed bad men—'*sinon que probablement ils seront pendus.*'

He must surely have felt, when he wrote it, that this was not true, and not in the smallest degree like the truth. Make criminal law so severe as to hang every one who systematically follows his own private interest, and systematically ignores the interests of all the rest of the world, and you would turn the world into one vast place of execution. Law proper is of very subordinate importance, and of necessarily diminishing importance as a moralising agent. It can only restrain people from gross and stupid offences

which no bad man of the least ingenuity would ever desire to commit.

Admitting then that he answers that infinitesimally small minority of wicked men who cannot prey upon society without cutting throats, picking pockets, and forging bills of exchange, Voltaire by his own admission has nothing whatever to say to the man who says, 'I shall make my own enjoyment the one object of my life; I shall gratify every passion I feel without the faintest regard for my neighbour's interests, and I shall violate every law, human and divine, and every principle of morality, wherever I think that the advantage to be gained by doing so is not counterbalanced by the danger of punishment.' It must be owned that this is a considerable and most important gap in the moral theories of a man who regarded himself, and not by any means unjustly, as the principal leader of a moral and religious revolution.

It is true that he makes a sort of attempt to provide a substitute for the penal sanctions of morality, by reference to what he regards as the reasons why men are moral in fact—namely, pride, and the fear of contempt. In this he repeats the unsatisfactory paradoxes of Mandeville, which probably never satisfied any one, and which, it would appear, did not continue to satisfy Voltaire himself.

In the latter part of his life he appears to have inclined rather to the view of morality which regards all moral questions of importance as clear in themselves, and which looks upon the conscientious

sanction as the real reason for being moral. This is a far more amiable frame of mind than the one which displays itself in the *Traité de Métaphysique*, but it is not an intellectually complete or strong one. *Quis custodiet?* What is the guarantee of conscience? Such as it is, this view is vigorously stated in the poem called *La Loi Naturelle*, which was published together with the one on the earthquake at Lisbon.

The following lines are a fine example of that vein of natural piety which certainly did exist in Voltaire, and which had perhaps more to do with his popularity than many people suppose.

Sur son Dieu, sur sa fin, sur sa cause première,  
L'homme est-il sans secours à l'erreur attaché ?  
Quoi ! le monde est visible et Dieu serait caché ?  
Quoi ! le plus grand besoin que j'aie en ma misère  
Est le seul qu'en effet je ne puis satisfaire ?  
Non ; le Dieu qui m'a fait ne m'a point fait en vain,  
Sur le front des mortels il mit son sceau divin.

La morale uniforme en tous temps, en tout lieu,  
A des siècles sans fin parle au nom de ce Dieu,  
C'est la loi de Trajan, de Socrate et la vôtre,  
De ce culte éternel la nature est l'apôtre ;  
Le bon sens la reçoit, et les remords vengeurs  
Nés de la conscience en sont les défenseurs ;  
Leur redoutable voix partout se fait entendre.

A little farther on he goes the full length of regarding conscience as the direct voice of God.

Jamais un parricide, un calomniateur,  
N'a dit tranquillement au fond de son cœur :  
'Qu'il est beau, qu'il est doux d'accabler l'innocence,  
De déchirer le sein qui nous donna naissance !

Dieu juste, Dieu parfait ! que le crime a d'appas.  
Voilà ce qu'on dirait, mortels, n'en doutez pas,  
S'il n'était une loi terrible universelle  
Que respecte le crime en s'élevant contre elle.  
Est-ce nous qui créons ces profonds sentiments ?  
Avons-nous fait notre âme ? avons-nous fait nos sens ?

Le ciel fit la vertu, l'homme en fit l'apparence.  
Il peut la revêtir d'imposture et d'erreur ;  
Il ne peut la changer : son juge est dans son cœur.

Such sentiments as these, and the two peculiarities which characterise every line of Voltaire's moral speculations—his passionate belief in universal morality, and his persistent determination to regard morality as a branch of religion, and to connect it in the most intimate manner with the doctrine of the existence of God—explain many things in Voltaire's writings which are continually overlooked, and are, in point of fact, the key to a great part of his sentiments.

It would be altogether a mistake to regard him as a systematic philosopher bent on thinking out the theory of any of the great subjects which specially attracted his attention, and capable of appreciating, and determined to solve, their various difficulties. What he did was to collect as it were into a focus the opinions of the great thinkers of his age, and to mould them into a passionate protest against its official creed. In such an undertaking a man must have a standing-ground which either really is, or at all events appears to him to be, impregnable to all antagonists. The standing-ground occupied by Voltaire, as by others in somewhat similar situations,



was a belief in God, and an immutable universal morality, testified of by conscience, and, as he thought, trampled on and set at nought by the establishments which he assailed so fiercely.

Those who can see nothing in him but a blasphemous scoffer ought to bear in mind not merely the fact that he held these views, as we should say, with more sincerity than logic, but that he acted upon them vigorously when the occasion arose, as in the famous case of Calas. But though this ought not to be forgotten, it was equally true that his morality was not only rhetorical, but also singularly partial. He was very indulgent to a large class of vices, although those which he abhorred and withstood were no doubt sufficiently detestable. His own life in many particulars was, as all the world knows, open to abundance of charges. The net result of his ethical doctrines is, that of a sermon against cruelty, intolerance, and fanaticism, and in favour of mutual kindness amongst men. He preaches in every possible tone, from the most frivolous to the most solemn and pathetic; but when all is said and done, he is a preacher and a rhetorician, and not a philosopher or a legislator.

#### 4. VOLTAIRE AS A METAPHYSICIAN

Thus far we have tried to give some sort of notion of the position of Voltaire as a moralist and a theologian, and have pointed out the fact that he ought

to be regarded in the light, not of a philosophical and impartial inquirer into truth, but rather in that of the most eager, vehement, and able, of all the advocates who distinguished themselves in that great cause, the pleading of which was the chief literary, philosophical, and religious event of the eighteenth century. We think that the more his works are studied the more will the truth of this criticism be appreciated, but there is perhaps, no part of his endless writings in which it is so manifest as in his metaphysical works. They are mixed up, like everything else that he wrote, except indeed his historical and poetical works, with all sorts of other matter, and are made the texts of an infinite number of disquisitions on all sorts of subjects.

His metaphysical position may be defined very shortly. He played Moses to the Aaron of the great English writers of the early part of the eighteenth century, and above all to Locke and Newton in their respective spheres. Locke, however, was his great standard authority upon all metaphysical subjects. He says of him in one place, '*La métaphysique n'a été jusqu'à Locke qu'un vaste champ de chimères : Locke n'a été vraiment utile que parce qu'il a resserré ce champ où l'on s'égarait. Il n'a eu raison, et il ne s'est fait entendre que parce qu'il est le seul qui se soit entendu lui-même.*'

This is only one instance of an admiration which was continually expressed with almost fanatical earnestness. Metaphysics, according to Voltaire's

way of using language, included all the great subjects of human interest. He almost invariably speaks of theology, ethics, and all that we should now call psychology, as being branches of metaphysics; he appears, in short, to have meant by the word, a general all-embracing system of philosophy, which either answered, or else declared to be unanswerable, all the principal questions of speculation.

The most systematic exposition of his views on this subject is to be found in his *Éléments de la Philosophie de Newton*, written about 1735, and published in 1738. A good deal of it is repeated in the *Traité de Métaphysique* and the *Philosophe Ignorant*. The order in which Voltaire arranges the different elements of his philosophy in this work, is singularly opposed to that which our modern views of things would suggest. Instead of proceeding from simple to difficult subjects, he begins at the other end. Thus the first chapter is on the being of God, which is established by physical arguments such as these. 'If the world is finite, if there is a vacuum, matter does not exist necessarily. It has, therefore, received its existence from a free being. If matter gravitates, which is demonstrated, it appears not to gravitate naturally, as it is naturally extended; it has then received gravitation from God. If the planets turn in one direction rather than another in a non-resisting space, the hand of their creator must have directed their course in that direction with absolute liberty.'

He states the atheistical theory of the infinity of

the universe, of motion being a fixed quantity, and of the impossibility that anything should come of nothing, or return to nothing, and refers to Samuel Clarke's demonstration of the existence of God for an answer to it. He afterwards states Newton's views about space and time in the abstract, and gives an account of Clarke's controversy with Leibnitz as to space and time, the necessity of the existence of matter, and other such topics. In succeeding chapters he states the views of Newton and Clarke as to free will in God and free will in man, and goes into an elaborate account of his own views on that subject, which ends in giving his countenance, on the whole, to Locke's theory, which practically makes liberty no more than the absence of restraint upon power.

He then goes on to the question of the nature of morality, and from thence to the question of the nature of the soul, and on this subject he states the principal views which have been held by philosophers as to its essence, and as to the manner in which it is united to the body. He refers, here as elsewhere, to the well-known passage in Locke's essay in which Locke says that he did not see why God might not have given the faculty of thought to matter, as well as the faculties of movement, gravitation, vegetation, and the like, and he says that he had heard that Newton had told Locke that he was of the same opinion.

Voltaire then gives an account of the various systems which had been invented to account for thought, of which he mentions four: (1) The material

theory according to which ideas are impressed on the understanding like a stamp upon wax. This, he says, was rather a rough instinct than a calculation. (2) The theory that body and soul are two totally dissimilar entities, which have nothing in common, and which nevertheless God has created to act on each other. This, he supposes, is the one most commonly received. (3) The theory of Malebranche, which interposed God between the body and the soul, so that when any material object affected the body, God created a corresponding feeling in the soul; and when the soul wanted to act on the body, God did whatever the will required. This is the famous theory of seeing and doing all things in God. (4) The pre-established harmony of Leibnitz, according to which the soul and the body are two clocks, which always keep time exactly, though independent of each other.

He proceeds from this to the elements of matter, to the question whether there is or is not an original matter, whether there are monads such as were imagined by Leibnitz and what Leibnitz meant by them, and to the various controversies as to force. It is after this metaphysical introduction that he arrives at Newton's discoveries in optics, in the theory of gravitation, and in astronomy.

It will be seen from this short account of Voltaire's exposition of metaphysics that he was, in the sense in which the word is used by the positivists of our own days, emphatically a metaphysician, though he was a metaphysician, who had got to the length of

feeling uneasy as to the value of the method which he employed, and well aware that, if used at all, its results must be very largely tempered with doubt. So far indeed as our acquaintance with his voluminous works will enable us to judge, the whole history of his mind was the history of the progress of metaphysical doubt as to the possibility of metaphysics. Much more confidence in metaphysical processes is shown in the *Philosophie de Newton* than in the *Philosophie Ignorant* or the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*.

In many men such a process would have led to scepticism, but Voltaire was as far from being a sceptic as any man who ever lived. One of the most characteristic features of his mind is the absence from it of all sympathy with a general spirit of doubt and indecision. No reproach is more common than that of scepticism, nor is there any one which is so often made unjustly. The sceptic is a man who denies the possibility of knowledge, and not, as the common use of the word would appear to imply, a man who regards particular doctrines, and especially particular religious doctrines, as doubtful in themselves. It would surely be an abuse of language to describe a man as sceptical about the history of China, because he was clearly of opinion that his own knowledge of that subject was so slight and vague as to be practically worthless. Voltaire's scepticism, such as it was, was all of this kind.

He thought that men knew nothing definite about the nature of their own souls, about the question

whether the soul did or did not survive the body, and if so under what conditions, about the freedom of the will, the nature and ultimate constitution of matter, and many other topics of the same sort. Yet he was firmly convinced that men have a great variety of perfectly trustworthy knowledge on other subjects. He thought that the existence of God was morally certain; that there was a universally acknowledged morality which was one great proof of God's existence; and that there was a moral certainty that all that is distinctive in the Christian history, and in the theology founded upon it, was false.

He also believed without the least hesitation in the lessons taught by physical science, and in many parts of his works does his utmost to refute the common assertion, that mathematics contain mysteries which afford a warrant for the theological mysteries which he refused to believe. This is the very antithesis to scepticism. It is extreme, unhesitating, uncompromising confidence in the power of the human mind, to say what it will and what it will not believe, what it will affirm, what deny, and what doubt, and for what reasons.

In considering his specific opinions in the former part of this article, the tendency of his mind towards fixed definite views has sufficiently appeared. The manner in which he dwelt, with continually increasing vigour of assertion, on the universality of morals, on their plainness, and on the primary and almost exclusive importance of the conscientious sanction in

enforcing them, is a good illustration of this. The progress of his views on free will is another. In the account of Newton's philosophy (Ch. ii.) he says : 'Il paraît donc probable que nous avons la liberté d'indifférence dans les choses indifférentes. Car qui pourra dire que Dieu ne nous a pas fait ou n'a pas pu nous faire ce présent ? Et s'il l'a pu, et si nous sentons en nous ce pouvoir, comment assurer que nous ne l'avons pas ?'

In the succeeding chapters, however, of the same work, he admits that there are great difficulties in the way of believing in a liberty of indifference, and he states no less than fifteen, with extraordinary point and force in chap. v., which contains a page and a half. He appears, however, to have been terrified at the doctrine towards which he was drifting.

'Il faut convenir' (he says) 'qu'on ne peut guère répondre que par une éloquence vague aux objections contre la liberté, *triste sujet sur lequel le plus sage craint même de penser*. Une seule réflexion console ; c'est que quelque système qu'on embrasse, à quelque fatalité qu'on croit toutes nos actions attachées, on agira toujours comme si on était libre.'

In the *Traité de Métaphysique* he still clung to the doctrine of free will, though he had brought it into a singular shape which might be called obscure for him. It appears to be adapted from Locke's theory that liberty consists in the power of suspending action to give time for deliberation. After stating the well-known argument, 'L'entendement agit nécessaire-



ment ; la volonté est déterminée par l'entendement, donc la volonté est déterminée par une volonté absolue, donc l'homme n'est pas libre,' he proceeds to say that, at bottom, this is a sophism.

He admits that the will cannot choose anything which the understanding does not represent to it as being pleasant ; but he says : 'C'est en cela même que consiste sa liberté, c'est dans le pouvoir de se déterminer soimême à faire ce qui lui paraît bon ; vouloir ce qui ne lui ferait pas plaisir, est une contradiction formelle, et une impossibilité. L'homme se détermine à ce qui lui semble le meilleur, et cela est incontestable, mais le point de la question est de savoir s'il a en soi cette force mouvante, ce pouvoir primitif de se déterminer ou non.'

Later in life he gave up the whole theory of free will. Thus, in *Le Philosophe Ignorant* (ch. xiii.) he says : 'L'homme est en tout un être dépendant comme la nature entière est dépendante ; il ne peut être excepté des autres êtres.' He adds : 'L'ignorant qui pense ainsi n'a pas toujours pensé de même, mais enfin il est contraint de se rendre.' He expresses the same opinion with his usual terseness, in an article on liberty in the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, in a little dialogue, the gist of which is, that liberty is nothing else than the power to do what one pleases, which would be more accurately expressed by saying that liberty is nothing but the absence of any restraint, which would prevent us from doing what, but for that restraint, we should wish to do. My liberty to

walk down the Strand consists in the fact that, wishing under all the circumstances of the case to do so, I am able to do as I wish.

Voltaire says himself of the gradual change in his opinions (*Phil. Ign.* ch. xiii.): 'Cette question sur la liberté de l'homme m'intéressa vivement; je lus des scolastiques, je fus comme eux dans les ténèbres; je lus Locke et j'aperçus des traits de lumière; je lus le traité de Collins, qui me paraît Locke perfectionné; et je n'ai jamais rien lu depuis qui m'ait donné un nouveau degré de connaissance.'

This is a remarkable passage, as it shows how pertinaciously Voltaire thought on these topics. He had read both Locke and Collins before he wrote his account of Newton's philosophy, in which the subject is first discussed, and in which he describes as sophisms the very arguments which at last prevailed with him. This work was published in 1738. The *Traité de Métaphysique* seems to have been written some time later, and the *Philosophe Ignorant* and the *Dictionnaire Philosophique* were amongst his latest works.

Whatever else may be said about the doctrines of free will and necessity, there can be no question that the latter doctrine is the one towards which minds which are at once dogmatic, and impatient of anything which cannot be distinctly imagined, naturally gravitate. It is characteristic of the practical character and the substantial earnestness which underlay Voltaire's superficial levity and persiflage that he should have gradually worked his way to this opinion, having

held a very different one when he was forty-four years of age, and one of the most distinguished writers and thinkers of his generation. It is also highly characteristic of him that, whilst he maintained, and yet gradually modified his own opinion, he should have stated with perfect fairness, and in the most terse and pointed manner, the very objections to his opinion which afterwards made him change it.

His theory as to the soul implies a further illustration of the truth of these remarks. It is a point on which he does not vary. His view from first to last was that the soul may be a mere faculty, resulting from the disposition of the bodily organs, and ceasing when they are thrown out of gear; but that it also may be an independent unit, which may survive the body, and retain its consciousness and capacity of enjoyment and suffering. The way in which these two sets of ideas balanced each other in Voltaire's mind, and the practical inference which he drew from them, are perfectly and most characteristically illustrated by two passages in the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, which, according to their author's practice, condense into a few lines reflections which he had been applying, arranging, rearranging, and clearing up for much more than half a century. They appear to us to be as characteristic of the deepest and most habitual thoughts of the man as anything he ever wrote.

In the 'article 'Âme,' sect. viii., he says: 'Pauvre pédant, tu vois une plante qui végète, et tu dis

*végétation*, ou même *âme végétative* ; tu remarques que les corps ont et donnent du mouvement, et tu dis *force* ; tu vois ton chien de chasse apprendre sous toi son métier, et tu cries *instinct*, *âme sensitive* ; tu as des idées combinées, et tu dis *esprit*.

‘ Mais de grâce qu’entends-tu par ces mots ? Cette fleur végète, mais y a-t-il un être réel qui s’appelle *végétation* ? Ce corps en pousse un autre ; mais possède-t-il en soi un être distinct qui s’appelle *force* ? Ce chien te rapporte une perdrix ; mais y a-t-il un être qui s’appelle *instinct* ? .- . .

‘ Si une tulipe pouvait parler, et qu’elle te dit : Ma végétation et moi nous sommes deux êtres joints évidemment ensemble, ne te moquerais-tu pas de la tulipe ? ’

The last illustration ought, one would think, to have raised in Voltaire’s mind the precise point which, so far as we are aware, he always misses in relation to this subject. It is precisely the power of speech, or rather the power which speech implies—the power, that is, of regarding ourselves and other things as distinct realities, knowable and namable, which is the specific peculiarity of a rational being, and which gives us the idea of a soul, obscure as that idea certainly is. If a tulip could speak, it might no doubt speculate about itself as men do ; but as it cannot speak, we do not regard it as a self. It is because we cannot say whether, and how far, animals do speak and think, that we do not know specifically what to think of them.

Voltaire's ignorance of the difficulties connected with the whole subject of etymology may be inferred from his articles in the *Dictionnaire Philosophique* headed 'A. B. C.' and 'Langues.' Be this as it may, the extract just given states shortly the extreme point of Voltaire's oscillations in the direction of the materialism of his age.

The following extract from the article 'Dieu' shows how far his mind swung in the other direction, and is on the whole more in harmony with the habitual tone of his writings than the other. In sect. v., 'De la nécessité de croire un Être suprême,' he is arguing against atheism: 'La philosophie, selon vous, ne fournit aucune preuve d'un bonheur à venir. Non, mais vous n'avez aucune démonstration du contraire. Il se peut qu'il y ait en nous une monade indestructible qui sente et qui pense sans que nous sachions le moins du monde comment cette monade est faite. La raison ne s'oppose pas absolument à cette idée, quoique la raison seule ne la prouve pas. Cette opinion n'a-t-elle pas un prodigieux avantage sur la vôtre? La mienne est utile au genre humain, la vôtre est funeste. . . .

'Dans le doute où nous sommes tous deux, je ne vous dis pas avec Pascal, *prenez le plus sûr*. Il n'y a rien de sûr dans l'incertitude. Il ne s'agit pas ici de parier mais d'examiner; il faut juger, et notre volonté ne détermine pas notre jugement. Je ne vous propose pas de croire des choses extravagantes pour vous tirer d'embarras; je ne vous dis pas: Allez à la Mecque,

baisez la pierre noire pour vous instruire ; tenez une queue de vache à la main ; affublezvous d'un scapulaire ; soyez imbécile et fanatique pour acquérir la faveur de l'Être des êtres. Je vous dis : Continuez à cultiver la vertu, à être bienfaisant, à regarder toute superstition avec horreur ou avec pitié ; mais adorez avec moi le dessein qui se manifeste dans toute la nature, et par conséquent l'auteur de ce dessein, la cause primordiale et finale de tout ; espérez avec moi que notre monade, qui raisonne sur le grand Être éternel pourra être heureuse par ce grand Être même. Il n'y a point là de contradiction. Vous ne m'en démontrerez pas l'impossibilité ; de même que je ne puis vous démontrer mathématiquement que la chose est ainsi. Nous ne raisonnons guère en métaphysique que sur des probabilités ; nous nageons tous dans une mer dont nous n'avons jamais vu le rivage. Malheur à ceux qui se battent en nageant ! Abordera qui pourra ; mais celui qui me crie, Vous nagez en vain, il n'y a point de port, me décourage et m'ôte toutes mes forces.'

These illustrations are meant rather to show in what manner, and for what purpose, and in what tone, Voltaire speculated upon metaphysical subjects, than to give anything claiming to be a systematic account of his metaphysical doctrines, if indeed he can be properly reckoned amongst the great thinkers of the eighteenth century upon such topics. Such as they are, they appear to us to prove that as a theologian or moralist, or as a metaphysician, which in his case

were three aspects of one character, he always displayed the same disposition in various ways. He was never a mere spéculator or theorist, but always had in view definite practical results, towards the attainment of which he was impelled principally by his indignation against the general condition of things.

Perhaps the most general doctrine which can fairly be ascribed to him is, that the great fault of the order of things in which he found himself, was an unreasonable and presumptuous confidence in supposed knowledge, leading people to overlook or deny their real ignorance and weakness, and to undervalue that which they ought to have regarded as their strength. Hence the main stress of all his intellectual efforts was towards lowering the tone of those who made the greatest pretensions to knowledge, and insisting to the utmost on the slightness of our materials for profitable thought, upon the topics which interest us, as human beings, most deeply. It is true that in all that he wrote, there is the strangest possible contrast between the confidence, not to say the arrogance, of the process, and the humility of the result—between his passionate confidence in human reason, and the timid and melancholy conclusions to which the instrument in which he so entirely trusted conducted him. But this, after all, was only an accidental contrast, not an essential inconsistency.

The most interesting question which a retrospect on his speculations suggests, relates to his influence on the subsequent history of his nation. There is no

more common opinion than that Voltaire was one of the principal authors of the French Revolution, and the scandals which attended that tremendous event have, no doubt, done more than any mere criticisms to cover his name with the discredit which attaches to it. Of course it cannot be doubted that his influence over his own generation operated powerfully on the course of events which culminated in the Revolution; but we cannot believe that the repulsive features of that series of events can be justly ascribed to his influence, except to an extent much more limited than the language commonly used upon the subject would suggest.

The two great blots on the French Revolution are the horrible barbarity and fanaticism with which many of its scenes were accompanied, and its anti-religious character; but we greatly doubt whether Voltaire's influence contributed much to either of these things. That irreligion may be as fanatical as any form of religious belief whatever, is an indisputable truth, which no doubt was frequently illustrated in the course of the Revolution, but the whole temper of Voltaire's works is utterly opposed to such a state of mind.

A fanatical Voltairian is an inconceivable being, for such a person would be fanatically in favour of a set of opinions far too complicated and qualified to excite any vehement emotion. How could any one be fanatically attached to the doctrines that there is in all probability a God whom we must



regard on the whole as just and benevolent, and that there are grounds on which we may hope for a future state of existence preferable to the present one?

Moreover, the whole tone of Voltaire's mind, the constant burden of his works, is as much opposed to every sort of cruelty and violence as any writings can be opposed to any turn of mind whatever. In his preface to *Alzire* he says with great truth, 'On retrouvera dans presque tous mes écrits cette humanité qui doit être le premier caractère d'un être pensant.' Nor was his humanity of that ferocious and passionate kind of which the proper motto is 'fraternity or death.' Few things would have a stronger tendency to repress this ferocious sensibility than a study of Voltaire's works, and sympathy with the whole tone of mind which produced them.

Besides this, it should be observed that no one knew better than Voltaire the ferocious side of the French character, or had a worse opinion of it. The brutalities of the 'Comité de Salut Public'; the massacres of September 1792; the atrocities practised in La Vendée (on both sides), at Lyons, and in many other places, are not isolated facts in French history, showing themselves for the first time in a generation corrupted by Voltaire.

Not to dwell upon the consideration that the furious mobs of Paris and of other places by whom these iniquities were perpetrated, and who had been left by the government and the clergy in a

state of the most abject ignorance, could hardly have been debauched by reading books the very titles of which most of them would have been unable to decipher, it may be as well to remember that in the wars of religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and in the wars between the Burgundians and Armagnacs at an earlier period, just as much ferocity was displayed whenever the people became excited, and that the Legitimists—who, if they had had the chance, would have flayed Voltaire alive with pleasure—were themselves every bit as cruel and ferocious, whenever and wherever they got the upper hand, as their opponents. There was not much to choose between the *Terreur* Blanche and the *Terreur* Rouge, and it would be difficult to find in any author stronger denunciations of the temper of mind which led to both sets of crimes than are to be found in every part of Voltaire's writings.

With the irreligious aspect of the French Revolution Voltaire's works had no doubt a closer connection. No doubt his persistent denunciations of every form of Christianity produced a marked effect on the history of the Revolution. No doubt his constant ridicule of all objects of popular reverence contributed largely to that ignorant self-sufficiency, which was one of the worst features of the revolutionary period.

It would, however, be most unjust to confine our observations to the bad side of Voltaire's antagonism to religion. He was the antagonist, not only of Christianity in general, but more particularly of that

special form of it, which was in his days dominant in France; and it is impossible to deny, with any appearance of truth, that if he failed (as no doubt he did) in the attempt to pull up Christianity by the roots, and to destroy its influence amongst mankind, he succeeded triumphantly in compelling the particular Christian Church with which he was concerned, to change its position entirely with reference to temporal affairs, to change its position, though it could not well change its tone, as to spiritual affairs, and to accept an utterly different position in the world from that in which he found it.

When Voltaire was young, the theory of the French monarchy, and of the greater part of Europe, as to the foundations of civil society and the natural relations between the Church and the State, was the theory of Bossuet. The theory of Locke was the rising heresy of the day. There is at present hardly an important country in Europe in which this is not altogether reversed, in which the State has not become the substantive and the Church the adjective, religious equality the rule, and privilege, not to speak of persecution, the exception; in which, in a word, men have not come to treat religion practically as a matter of opinion, and not as a system by which opinion is to be governed.

No one writer contributed so powerfully to this result as Voltaire, no event contributed to it so powerfully as the French Revolution; and in so far as Voltaire's writings gave this character to the

Revolution, they gave it a good character, and not a bad one, and they have met so far, not with failure, but with marked and increasing success. How far his incautious and indecent way of expressing himself may have contributed to that part of the Revolution which he would have been the first to condemn, we do not inquire; but all just critics ought to admit that he would have advocated precisely those parts of the Revolution which have been blessings to mankind, and reprobated those which disgraced its progress, and that in doing so he would have acted in perfect consistency with the whole tenor and character of his career.

## XIV

### BISHOP BUTLER<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. SERMONS

It may be doubted whether any writer within the last century has made such a réputation with so few pages as Bishop Butler. Indeed, in his own department, no English writer since Hooker has made an equal reputation. His success has been so great that it is very difficult to speak of him at all, without falling into the danger of conventional flattery on the one hand, or presumption on the other. There are still, however, a few remarks to be made upon some aspects of his writings, which are perhaps not altogether familiar.

The literary and philosophical position of Butler is in itself curious. Although it was once, and in some quarters still is, the fashion to talk of the influence of the English Deists as ephemeral and shallow, there can be no doubt that they set stones

<sup>1</sup> *Works of Bishop Butler.* 2 vols. Oxford.

rolling which ran a tremendous course all over the Continent, and of which we are far from having heard the last in England. The single name of Voltaire is enough to show what they did, and Voltaire was the pupil of Bolingbroke.

It is one of the most singular facts in the history of theology that Deism should have been of English growth, and that, when translated to the Continent, it should have encountered hardly any opposition of an intellectual kind worth mentioning, whilst in England it should have been so decisively defeated in controversy that it had to be reimported from the Continent before it could take any fresh hold on the English mind. There can, however, be no doubt at all that the fact was so. France and Germany both learnt the greater part of their scepticism from England, though Bayle might certainly have given them lessons in it; but in France and Germany in the eighteenth century, orthodoxy, after the time of Leibnitz, had hardly any champions at all, whilst in England, Butler, Berkeley, Warburton, Lardner, Paley, and Abraham Tucker (whose orthodoxy, however, was of a very peculiar kind) were not only better writers, but men of quite a different calibre from their opponents, if we except always Hume and Gibbon.

Few subjects would better deserve attention than a full inquiry into the question why this was the case. We can refer to the fact only as illustrating Butler's position. He, and his fellow apologists, occupy in the history of controversy a position a little like that which

the allied Sovereigns of 1815 occupy in political history. They won an undoubted victory, and checked and to some extent diverted a great movement, but neither victory has been conclusive.

The old questions, both in politics and in theology, are still outstanding; and as the European political settlement of 1815 has proved to be very far from final, so the triumph of the English apologists of the eighteenth century, solid and highly important and beneficial as it was in many respects, has not finally closed the controversies in which it formed an important epoch. If we try to estimate the part which Butler played in this controversy, and to extract from the vague conventional praise, which is so lavishly bestowed upon him, a definite notion of the results which he really did obtain, it is natural to consider the question with reference, first, to his Sermons, and, next, to his *Analogy*. We shall confine ourselves for the present to the former.

Though Butler's fame rests principally on the *Analogy*, it appears to us that his Sermons are, in every respect, entitled to take precedence of his more celebrated and popular performance. They contain far more of Butler himself. They are written on his own principles, and not, as he himself observes of the *Analogy*, on the principles of others; and here and there, though it must be owned at rare intervals, they allow the reader to get a glimpse of a vein of feeling less habitually cheerless than that which pervades the *Analogy*.

If, indeed, Butler had written nothing but the *Analogy*, and if his character and career had been as retired, for instance, as that of Hooker, he would have been remembered as an advocate of consummate skill and caution; but it would always have been a moot point whether he was not a greater sceptic than those against whom he pleaded, and whether, substantially, his triumph had not consisted in a skilful trumping of scepticism by reversing its action. His sermons certainly show that such an impression would have been very unjust. No one who reads them can doubt that their author was not merely a devout believer in religion, but a profoundly pious man. They form the natural introduction to the *Analogy*, which is liable to great misconstruction if it is read without reference to them, and which indeed it is not altogether easy to reconcile with the principles which they lay down. We will try shortly to state a few of their leading principles, and to show how they are related to the *Analogy*.

Of the many commonplaces which have been devised about Butler, none is so common as that which compares him to Bacon. We have seen a copy of the *Analogy*, in the first page of which, the owner, when an undergraduate, had inscribed (in perfect ignorance of the fact that Chalmers had done the very same thing), 'This work might be entitled An Application of the Principles of Inductive Philosophy to Revealed Religion.' Under this, with a date a few years later, was written (what Chalmers did not write), 'When I



wrote this I had no knowledge of Inductive Philosophy, and not much of Revealed Religion.' This candid retractation was, we think, well founded.

There is a superficial resemblance between Butler, and the common notion of Bacon, but the resemblance is very superficial. Butler was emphatically an *a priori* reasoner, and a believer in intuition on moral subjects. His correspondence with Clarke, an extraordinary effort for a young man of twenty-one, is a sufficient proof of this; and all the rest of his writings are in perfect harmony, when carefully considered, with the principles of that correspondence.

The curious part of Butler's philosophical and controversial position is that he had very much in common with his principal antagonists; and the most plausible charge that can be made against him is that he did not sufficiently show how his apologetic writings were to be reconciled with his own principles as expressed in his Sermons.

It is, however, no doubt true that some very great and many eminent men, from the days of Descartes to our own, have united a belief in *a priori* reasoning with that firm hold of facts which is what people usually mean by the inductive spirit; and Butler, on his own subjects, affords an excellent example of the characteristic merits of this class. He had quite as much sympathy with the geometrical style in which Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, and Newton propounded their respective philosophies, as with the style to which we are accustomed in the

present day, and which aims almost exclusively at the description and classification of observed facts.

He uses, indeed, the more modern style, because it was better suited for the age in which he lived, and more likely to persuade those whom he addressed ; but his Sermons abound with proof that his heart was in the other method, that he looked within for his knowledge quite as much as without, and that, though he constantly insisted on the importance of external observation of religious belief, and held that all objections to orthodox Christianity might be dealt with on the principles common to himself and the more modern school of philosophy, he considered the older school as its true and natural foundation.

In order to give detailed proof of this from his Sermons, it would be necessary to show the assumptions on which they proceed, and to criticise minutely their phraseology, which is founded on that belief in nature considered as a constitution or organised whole, and in the essential fitness of things, which is the characteristic mark of the *a priori* thinker. The constant use of the words 'fit,' 'fitting,' and the like, and the conception of vice as something 'disproportionate' to nature, are sufficient illustrations of this. To follow this out, however, would be tedious ; and we will therefore try to give a short statement of a few of the principal propositions of Butler's Sermons, with a view to showing their relation to the *Analogy*.

The first two subjects of that part of the Sermons which can be regarded as in any way connected with

each other are God and Man, or rather the Divine and the Human Natures. Though the three celebrated Sermons on Human Nature stand first, and are much the best known, it will be found that, in order of thought, those which treat on the other topic ought to have the precedence.

The famous Sermons on the Love of God are, in our judgment, not only the greatest of Butler's writings, but also the first to which a person who wishes to understand them as a whole, should attend. Controversially, no doubt, this is not true, for the Sermons on Human Nature form a preface to them, by showing what Butler understood by Love in general, and how he distinguished different forms of it; but to a reader who views the subject not controversially, but in good faith, and with a real wish to enter into his author's meaning, this introduction is not necessary. Even if the thirteenth and fourteenth Sermons stood alone, such a reader would be perfectly able to understand them, and to see how they formed a foundation for the rest of his teaching.

Men, he says, are so constituted 'as to feel certain affections upon the sight or contemplation of certain objects,' which affections 'rest in those objects as an end, *i.e.* are satisfied with them.' Love is the relation between such an affection and its object. When we contemplate a good man with approbation for his goodness, to that extent we love him. Unite goodness with wisdom and power in the same person, and this love increases. Exalt them to the pitch of in-

finity, and let the person in whom they reside be 'our proper guardian and governor, having in view' the general happiness of all with whom 'he hath to do,' and being 'really our friend, and kind and good to us in particular, and so far approving us that we had nothing servilely to fear from him.' Let his scheme of government be beyond our powers of comprehension, and let our own state be such that we 'are in a progress of being towards something further.' Between such a being and the feelings of 'joy, gratitude, reverence, love, trust, and dependence,' 'there is as real a correspondence as between the lowest appetite of sense and its object.' 'That such a being is not a creature, but the Almighty God,' makes no other difference than that of exalting and confirming these feelings. Thus, 'Almighty God is the natural object of the several affections, love, reverence, fear, desire of approbation.' These together produce 'resignation to the Divine Will, which is the general temper belonging to this state, which ought to be the habitual frame of our mind and heart, and to be exercised at proper seasons more distinctly in acts of devotion.' This temper is perfect 'when we rest in his will as our end, as being in itself most just and right and good. And where is the impossibility of such an affection to what is just and right and good, such a loyalty of heart to the Governor of the Universe, as shall prevail over all sinister or indirect desires of our own?'

This will be found, after all, to have been the

central belief in Butler's mind, the cardinal point on which all his other speculations depend ; and there is much in other parts of his writings which makes it necessary to bear this in mind, for fear of doing him injustice.

Upon what theoretical grounds he based his belief in God, and in the attributes which in these Sermons are dwelt upon with such a mixture of awe and love, he nowhere says, in so many words. It is probable that, like other men, he owed them more to a pious education, and devout cast of mind, than to any chain of reasoning ; but such a man could not, of course, be without a theoretical basis for his belief. It must, however, be admitted that his writings contain no full and precise account of it ; and this is their great defect, for there can be no doubt that the *Analogy* must have suggested to many thousands of serious readers, the question which it is said to have suggested to Pitt : Why believe in a good God at all, if that belief is so encumbered with difficulties, that those who embrace it can be shown to be inconsistent, if they refuse, on moral grounds, to accept almost any established form of religion ?

There are, however, indications in Butler of the grounds on which he held this cardinal doctrine, though there is no express statement of them. His correspondence with Clarke goes to the edge of saying that he considered the existence of God, and his moral attributes, to be established by demonstrative proof, and the same is implied in the general cast of

his Sermons, though we do not think it is anywhere expressly stated.

Probably the unconscious influence of a life of piety and devotion filled him with an inward persuasion of its truth, which led him to expect with too much confidence that others would think as he did, and to be too sure that he had reduced his antagonist *ad absurdum*, when he had shown that his principles led to the denial of a doctrine which, to himself, appeared absolutely certain and undeniable. Be this how it may, it is, we think, indisputable that the belief, and the affections rising out of that belief, which are so earnestly asserted in the two Sermons in question, were as a fact the leading fundamental articles of Butler's creed, and were believed by him to be altogether beyond the reach of any doubt which it was not a sin to entertain.

Passing from this, we come to his well-known Sermons on Human Nature, to which those on Compassion, Resentment, and the Forgiveness of Injuries form a sort of supplement. Even if these Sermons were less well known than they are, it would be foolish to try to sum them up, for the operation has been already performed by their author, in a passage which could not be abbreviated, and which requires no addition. 'The nature of man is adapted to some course of conduct or other. Upon comparing some actions with this nature they appear suitable and correspondent to it; from comparison of other actions with the same nature there arises to our view some

unsuitableness or disproportion. The correspondence of actions to the nature of the agent renders them natural ; their disproportion to it unnatural. That an action is correspondent to the nature of the agent does not arise from its being agreeable to the principle which happens to be the strongest ; for it may be so and yet be quite disproportionate to the nature of the agent. The correspondence, therefore, or disproportion, arises from somewhat else. This can be nothing but a difference in nature and kind, altogether distinct from strength, between the inward principles. Some, then, are in nature and kind superior to others ; and the correspondence arises from the action being conformable to the higher principle, and the unsuitableness from its being contrary to it. Reasonable self-love and conscience are the chief or superior principles in the nature of man ; because an action may be suitable to this nature though all other principles be violated, but becomes unsuitable if either of those are. Conscience and self-love, if we understand our true happiness, always lead the same way. Duty and interest are perfectly coincident, for the most part, in this world, entirely and in every instance if we take in the future and the whole ; this being implied in the notion of a good and perfect administration of things.'

Thus Butler's doctrine, on the whole, resolves itself into the following articles : (1) Belief in a perfect God, who, however, acts in a sphere too wide to be comprehended in any degree by our intelligence.

(2) Belief in a constitution or nature of the human faculties, composed of various elements related to each other in fixed ways—conscience and reasonable self-love or prudence being the directing and predominant faculties. (3) Belief in the distinction between conscience and self-love, and in the ultimate identity of their results in the long run, founded on the first of these three articles.

It would occupy too much time and space to show how this theory was related to the speculations of the time, but we may just observe that the tendency against which Butler protests most habitually, and most strongly, is what he regarded as the abuse of analysis—the habit of resolving all the different affections of the mind into different forms of some one general passion, such as the love of power, or the love of self. Even when he does not expressly name Hobbes, he is continually writing at him, and, if he had lived a hundred years later, would no doubt have written at Bentham in the same manner. In this he certainly opposed a real evil, but he did so at the expense of falling into the opposite error of supposing that, wherever you find two words, there must be two things to correspond with them.

He nowhere clearly describes what he means by Conscience, nor does he in any degree account for its difference in different men, or show how it differs, if at all, from an habitual recollection of such principles of conduct as each individual happens to have accepted. He does not, indeed, appear to have



perceived that, until, by some means, we have acquired far more knowledge than we possess at present, about the mind and its ways of acting, all our language about its different faculties, and all attempts to arrange them according to a natural hierarchy, are little better than conjecture. When you do not know what you mean by a faculty, how can you say that there is a distinction in nature and kind between different faculties, and a natural supremacy in some over others?

If the passage quoted above is carefully considered, it will appear both to begin and end with an assumption. What proof is there that the nature of man is adapted to some course of conduct or other? Why may not the nature of A be quite different from that of B, and why may not C be unsuited for any course of conduct whatever? For what course of conduct is an idiot's nature adapted, and is not he a man? The final proposition, that conscience and self-love must in the long run coincide, 'this being implied in the notion of a good and perfect administration of things,' is one which ought never to be forgotten in reading Butler, for, if it is borne in mind, it will be found to qualify very deeply a large part of the *Analogy*.

If we can infer anything whatever from what is implied in the notion of a good and perfect administration of things, we have in our hands a means of judging of the truth of theological doctrines against the use of which by others, arguing against what he himself believed, Butler continually protested. The

whole drift of the *Analogy* is to compel his antagonists to look at facts. Yet he himself in this passage sets up a different test. Conscience and self-love cannot, he says, fall out in the long run, because a good and perfect administration of things would imply the contrary. It is, however, an indisputable fact that they do fall out in the short run; why, then, should they not fall out finally? This is just the same sort of argument which is constantly insisted on in the *Analogy*.

Other points in the reasoning are not, to us at least, altogether satisfactory; but the general result of the whole, as bearing on the argument of the *Analogy*, is what we specially wish to point out. It is that Butler himself had an *a priori* creed, that this *a priori* creed was itself open to the difficulties *a posteriori*, which he was so much in the habit of applying to the *a priori* belief of other people, and that thus, the effect of his writings is far less harshly triumphant than it is usually supposed to be.

It may be added that it is more humane and kindly. The two great points in all religion are belief in God and belief in a something divine in man, explain it how you will. These two great points Butler held, not merely as against objectors, but with a positive personal belief, and with a greater consciousness of the fact that they are encumbered with difficulties, than is usually ascribed to him. Of the divine side of the subject he speaks dogmatically, and without describing the process by which he reached his result.

Of the human side we do not think he speaks satisfactorily, because he is too precise, and looks too little at the vast variety of facts which really are relevant to the inquiry into the nature of conscience ; but he gives something like the truth, and denounces very vigorously the abuse of a process of which, in our opinion, he much underrated the use—the process of analysis.

It is difficult to leave the subject without a word on the well-known question of Butler's style. He himself protests against the imputation of obscurity, and his unrestricted admirers always say that he is obscure only, because the subject on which he writes is in its own nature difficult, and because he disdains ornament. There is some truth in this, but not the whole truth. Butler is obscure, partly, no doubt, because he writes on a difficult subject in a compressed style, but partly also because the gloom and languor of his disposition prevented him from expressing himself with life and spirit, and from using appropriate illustrations. Hume is quite as profound, and is not in the least obscure. Abraham Tucker is probably a closer reasoner, and he illustrates every proposition till its meaning is as plain as daylight. Specific proof, however, is better than mere assertion. Take the following sentence : 'Of the several affections or inward sensations which particular objects excite in man, there are some the having of which implies the love of *them* when *they* are reflected upon.' It appears from what follows that 'them' and 'they'

refer, not to the objects, but to the affections; but who would have discovered this from the sentence itself? Would not the following turn have made the whole much clearer?—‘There are certain affections which every one who feels them approves whenever he is conscious of feeling them, and these affections are excited by certain objects.’ The heaviness, the gloom, the want of life which pervaded all Butler’s writings were real defects, and very great ones, which it is mere flattery not to admit.

## XV

### BISHOP BUTLER<sup>1</sup>

#### 2. ANALOGY

THE observations already made on Butler's Sermons are chiefly useful as an introduction to some further observations on his more famous work, the *Analogy*. Perhaps no English theological treatise of modern times has met with so much success. It is praised by writers of the most discordant opinions, and is almost universally regarded as having at least silenced those whom it could not convince. Aggressive as it is in its substance, and still more in its tone, we do not know that any attempt to refute it, of sufficient importance to attract much attention, has ever been made. This singular measure of success, joined with the immense popularity of the book, justifies us in assuming on the part of our readers a pretty full acquaintance with its contents, and dispenses us from the obligation of giving any account of its character.

<sup>1</sup> *Works of Bishop Butler.* 2 vols. Oxford.

The first remark we have to make on the work is in the nature of literary criticism. Like most other controversial books, the *Analogy* is original, not in the sense of being new, but in the sense of being a statement which the author thoroughly understood, having recast and modelled in his own way the arguments which in his time were considered as most effective in the controversy in which he was interested.

There is little, perhaps nothing, in the *Analogy* which is not to be found elsewhere. Large parts of it are to be found in the elaborate arguments about the Manichees with which readers of Bayle's Dictionary are familiar. In Baxter's practical works, which are a mine of forgotten learning written in a wonderfully vigorous style, other branches of his argument are treated, and those who have a taste for inquiries of the kind, may trace back the use of the principal arguments on which Butler relies, to the very earliest period of theological controversy. He himself quotes a passage from Origen which contains the essence of his argument.

This is no deduction from the merits of the book. It is rather a proof of them, for no one can expect to invent new arguments on subjects which have engaged the earnest attention of mankind for many centuries. The utmost that can really be done is to restate the old ones in a manner accordant with the existing condition of thought and knowledge, and thoroughly to make them the mental property of the writer. This, if

well considered, gives the true theory of the progress of opinion. The new facts and new methods, which are by degrees brought to light, gradually supersede or invalidate old arguments, or set their real soundness in a clearer light than before.

Upon the book itself several observations arise. In the first place, it is important to remark that it is throughout an argument *ul homines*—an argument constructed on principles, and expressed in language, which are not the author's own ; and that one of its principal objects is to attack a view of things which no longer exists, at least to any considerable extent. 'In this position,' says Butler, 'I have argued upon the principles of others, not my own ; and have omitted what I think true, and of the utmost importance, because by others thought unintelligible or not true. Thus I have argued upon the principles of the Fatalists, which I do not believe, and have omitted a thing of the utmost importance which I do believe,—the moral fitness and unfitness of actions prior to all will whatever, which I apprehend as certainly to determine the divine conduct, as speculative truth and falsehood necessarily determine the divine judgment.'

Both in the preface and in the conclusion he arrives at last at the result that he has at all events proved that Christianity is not a contemptible imposture undeserving of notice. He says in his introduction, 'It will undeniably show, what too many want to have shown them, that the system of religion both natural and revealed . . . is not a subject of ridicule, unless

that of nature be so too.' And in the last paragraph of the whole work, after pointing out that as far as regards moral obligations, 'a serious apprehension that (Christianity) may be true, joined with doubt whether it be so,' is much the same as 'a full satisfaction of the truth of it,' he adds: 'It will appear that blasphemy and profaneness are absolutely without excuse, for there is no temptation to it but from the wantonness of vanity and mirth.'

There are probably few persons in the present day who would say that Christianity, or any other creed which has greatly influenced mankind, is a proper subject of ridicule, or a matter which it is in any way decent or permissible to treat with blasphemy or profaneness; and, whatever may have been the case in Butler's day, it would probably in our own, be quite unnecessary to argue such a point elaborately with any one in the smallest degree deserving of notice.

In order to obtain the true value and real meaning of the *Analogy* it is necessary for the reader to keep continually before his mind the fact that the whole book is written in a tone of austere reproof, and that the author has always before his eyes the figure of a profane jester whose one object in life is to escape from all the moral restraints of religion, and to bring into contempt and ridicule all that is considered sacred by other men. The air of extreme calmness and impartiality with which Butler uniformly writes appears to us to have been in reality the veil of profound indignation against those whom he was oppos-



ing ; and no doubt this singular union of perfect external calm, and apparent fairness, with the most intense conviction of the entire truth and ineffable sacredness of his own cause, and the most thorough conviction of the baseness of those who opposed it, has done very much to gain for him the position which he holds as a model Christian philosopher. People dearly like to be able to point to a writer who in his heart is an uncompromising partisan, but who always writes in a perfectly judicial style, and condemns his adversaries, not because they are his adversaries, but ostensibly because they are wrong.

We cannot, however, help feeling that the philosophical value of the *Analogy* is greatly diminished by this circumstance, which has contributed so largely to its popularity. It is almost impossible to write fairly from an antagonist's supposed point of view, or to do justice in such a constrained position either to him or to yourself. It is on this ground that the study of Butler's Sermons ought to precede that of the *Analogy*. The *Analogy*, taken by itself, seems to us to be not altogether fair to those at whom it is written, and, if it is taken as a substantive work, to be in many ways unsatisfactory, especially in the second part.

We will shortly indicate our reasons for this opinion. The first part is pervaded throughout by the suggestion that most of the objections to natural religion are founded in wickedness. The possibility of a *bona fide* doubt on such subjects is never steadily contemplated.

Perhaps the chapter which best illustrates the injustice of this view is the sixth, 'Of the Opinion of Necessity considered as influencing Practice.' The chapter is an elaborate demonstration of the proposition that fatalism is reconcilable with religion, and this is put, as if it were an objection to fatalism, instead of being an answer to an objection to it. The whole chapter is a remarkable instance of the inconvenience of trying to write from another person's point of view.

Another observation to the same effect arises upon the cardinal argument of the whole book, which is that Christianity reflects the difficulties which the constitution of the world opposes to the belief in God; therefore, if you believe in God upon the evidence which the world supplies, you ought not to disbelieve in any system of religion, claiming to be divinely revealed, on the score of the same difficulties. Probably, the objecting attitude of mind was so much controlled in Butler himself, by habits of another kind, as to prevent him from fully entering into the argument which would be raised against him by a person who really held, and consistently carried out, the view which he concedes for the moment, for the sake of showing it to be inconsistent and illogical.

Belief in God with him no doubt was a first principle, as his Sermons prove, but with those against whom the argument in the *Analogy* is directed, it was an inference, and a more or less doubtful inference, from the facts which they saw around them. He always

argues as if his opponent were really and at bottom as sure of the existence of God as he is himself, and as if his difficulty were to reconcile Christianity, or at least certain parts of it, with a belief in the divine goodness, which in itself was clearly proved on other grounds.

This we think was not correct. It is surely conceivable and intelligible that a man might say, 'When I look at this world as I see it around me, and without any special information about any other, I can on the whole think it probable that it has an author who is intelligent and, in the main, benevolent, because I can imagine that there may be ways in which evil may turn out to be good in disguise, or at all events to be a partial and exceptional phenomenon permitted for some reason of which I cannot judge; but if the veil of obscurity which hangs over the whole subject is withdrawn, and if I am informed, on authority which I cannot doubt, that the very parts of the economy of this world which form my great difficulty in believing at all in a good God, are characteristic and not exceptional, that they are not only what they seemed to be, but are parts of a general system reaching out to infinity, Christianity only increases the difficulties with which natural religion was already encumbered.

'If it was hard enough to believe that a benevolent being created a course of nature which involves amongst other things war, disease, poverty, and death, does it become easier to believe it, when you add the

fact that these temporal evils form a natural introduction to the doctrine of the eternal damnation of vast masses of the human race? An, apparently harsh action done by a person known to be in other respects most benevolent, may not destroy my belief that he is benevolent ; but it would be a strange way of arguing to say, that I must continue to be of that opinion if I learnt that this action was only a single illustration of a whole side of his character with which I had not been acquainted.'

Butler's argument is, There are objections to natural religion, which, as you, my antagonists, say, do not overthrow it. Why, then, should analogous objections overthrow Christianity? He nowhere deals with the answer which his principal antagonists gave, and which, in particular, form the substance of Voltaire's teaching on this point.

They would have said, 'In whatever degree Christianity is more precise, definite, and extensive than natural religion, in that same degree it must either be more difficult or more easy to prove. More difficult to prove, if its doctrines heighten the difficulties which, as you admit, encumber the proof of natural religion ; more easy, if they diminish or remove them. Now you do not say that Christianity removes those difficulties ; your contention is that it repeats them in a definite, authoritative form. Surely this is to increase them.'

Suppose some person were to announce from heaven, and to prove, by miracles or otherwise, a

scheme of theology, which thoroughly accounted for, and cleared up, all the difficulties of this present life; suppose he were to give us information about the nature and character of God, and about the position of man in creation and his future prospects, which enabled us to understand far more completely than is at present possible, the general scheme of creation, and in particular, the moral problems about human nature which at present appear so dark; would not such a revelation be in itself, and by force of the very words in which it is described, highly credible and probable? Should we not be inclined to believe in it for the very same reasons which lead us to believe that a key which unlocks a complicated lock is the true key? Surely we should; and if, in the same way, what claimed to be a revelation from heaven contained matters which contradicted, or appeared to contradict, all the notions which, upon the most careful consideration of all other sources of information open to us, we had formed of the divine character, we should say it was improbable, and required stronger evidence to induce us to believe it.

Whoever denies this ought to be prepared to say whether he will contend that it is not legitimate to argue in favour of Christianity against Buddhism or Mahometanism, upon the ground that the Christian conception of the divine character and attributes is higher, and more in unison with the teachings of natural religion on the subject, than those of the Buddhists or Mahometans.

If, however, this be admitted, then it cannot be denied that the general character of an alleged revelation may be compared with natural religion for the purpose of seeing whether, if it were true, it would increase or diminish the difficulty of religious belief.

Now the case of the Deists against Butler—the case of Hume, for instance, or Voltaire—was not, whereas Deism in itself was free from difficulties, such difficulties were imported into it by Christianity ; but, that, Deism being confessedly an imperfect and more or less rudimentary and Hypothetical view of the universe, Christianity, instead of explaining or alleviating its natural difficulties, made them worse, and would therefore require very strong evidence of its truth before it could be accepted.

Those who are at all acquainted with the writings of systematic divines will have little difficulty in understanding how this view of the matter might be sustained, and it is impossible not to feel that the *Analogy* does not answer it, though it is most dexterously contrived to answer the men who probably would have put forward such a view if the state of public feeling, and indeed the state of the law at the time, had permitted them to do so. The dexterity consists in taking for granted the doctrine of the existence of God as a matter not in dispute, and in neglecting the fact that infinite shades of opinion upon that subject exist, from a mere suspicion that perhaps there may be such a being up to the firmest positive conviction that there is.

The sort of Deists at whom Butler aims in his *Analogy* were not Theodore Parkers or Francis Newmans. They did not profess to have an unclouded internal vision of the divine character which led them at once to repudiate Christian theology as untrue and unworthy of God. To such men, no doubt, the argument of the *Analogy* applies with unanswerable force. They were men who were willing enough to take facts as they found them, and who were far from thinking that the constitution of nature proved the existence of a God of perfect benevolence.

The most popular and pungent of all Voltaire's writings is his satire on Optimism. Their case was simply that Christianity, as exhibited and proposed to them by the various churches and sects of their day, aggravated the natural difficulties of the whole subject of religion. It was for obvious reasons very difficult, and indeed almost impossible, for them to state this view broadly and plainly, and it would require more study of obscure books than it would be worth going through for such a purpose, to see whether they fully realised it themselves; but we do not think Butler has answered the objection so stated.

The whole tone and character of the book does indeed suggest an answer, and a very remarkable one, though it does not fully state it. The answer indicated is, that Christian theology is to be construed by, and brought into harmony with, the facts of nature; that we are to survey the world as we find

it, and see what traces it affords, for instance, of a system of punishment or a system of redemption, and then to say that this is what is—or, for aught we know, may be—meant by the doctrine of future punishment or redemption.

This we believe, or suppose, to be the meaning of a great deal of modern German speculation on these topics, and we think that Butler's mind clearly tended in that direction, and contained the germ of much which has been written about it since his time. We will try to illustrate this by reference to one or two of the subjects discussed in the *Analogy*, though our limits, and other obvious considerations, forbid us either to go into the question fully, or even to try to discuss its value.

In order to do this, and to do justice to the genius of its author, the controversial object of the *Analogy* ought to be put aside, and it should be taken in connection with the Sermons, not as an *argumentum ad homines* written on the principles of others, but as a substantive statement by Butler himself of the general drift and tendency of Christianity as he understood it. If viewed in this light, it would indeed lose that stern and pugnacious air which appears to form its chief attraction to many persons. It would no longer be possible to throw it, like a pail of moral cold water, over all religious enthusiasts, as if Butler had regarded a belief in a good God as a weakness to be trampled upon, and all attempts to apply to the divine conduct those prin-



ciples of goodness and justice which Butler believed to be innate and universal, as presumptuous folly. Yet, on the other hand, much would be gained by those to whom comprehensiveness, depth, and genuine goodness and holiness appear more honourable than the skill of an intellectual prize-fighter.

Taken in this way, Butler's general conception of religion would stand somewhat as follows. Its foundation, as we have already pointed out, would be laid in the belief, antecedent to experience and derived from our very nature, in a just and good God, whom we are to love, and whose way of dealing with the world is to be made the object of humble study by men. Such a study discloses, first of all, the fact that men will probably continue to think and feel after the event which we call death. It shows that the course of human actions is, as a fact, governed by rewards and punishments in the shape of those natural advantages and disadvantages which, as daily experience shows us, attend virtuous and vicious conduct respectively, and which are so contrived as to be suited to the development and improvement of our nature.

All this, however, is seen as in a glass darkly, inasmuch as the enormous extent of our ignorance, and the extreme imperfection even of what we call our knowledge, conceal many things from our view which might greatly modify our opinions if we were acquainted with them. In this state of things, we are told that it has pleased God to inform

maankind, by a messenger accredited by the power of working miracles, first that the anticipations, such as they are, which natural religion had led us to form are true in fact; and next, that the punishments and rewards of the present state of things will be carried out in a much more stringent form, and to a greater extent, in a future state; and, thirdly, that means of avoiding the consequences of wrong-doing have been miraculously afforded to those who choose to avail themselves of them. It is further added that the punishments and rewards, especially the former, which are thus announced, are analogous to the course of nature in that matter, with which we are already acquainted, and that the means of escape provided are analogous to the remedies provided by the course of nature for imprudence or misconduct in this world.

Unless it is understood that Butler's statement goes to this length, and is not a mere answer to an objection, it must be owned that it is of very little value. On the other hand, if it does go this length, as we think it does, this fact must considerably shake his reputation for orthodoxy in the sense of the stricter and more systematic writers on these subjects.

The best illustration of this is to be found in the famous argument in the second part on the doctrine of the Atonement. If Butler means to say that the Christian doctrine on the subject is, or for aught we know may be, only the highest case of the general

truth that the world is so organised that no one stands alone, and that vice and virtue respectively produce effects reaching far beyond the persons of those who practise them, he says something, which no doubt is greatly to the purpose, and which obviates most of the objections which are generally urged against the doctrine; but he does this by setting up a new doctrine, not by defending the one to which exception was taken, and which people in general, on both sides of the controversy, understood to be the true one.

What raised the objection was the theory of vicarious suffering. A sins, B suffers, and A escapes by reason of B's suffering. This, it is said, is unjust. Substantially Butler's answer is, You mistake the doctrine, which is that B suffers by reason of A's sin, and that B's suffering as a fact relieves A, and this is analogous to the order of nature. No doubt it is, but it is far from being analogous to the doctrine objected to.

Nature affords a thousand instances in which a man's faults injure his neighbour, and in which his efforts to serve his neighbour are painful to himself; but it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find one instance in which the course of nature affords a case of true expiation as objected to—that is, a case in which the suffering of A, and not something accidentally connected with and caused by the suffering, relieves B from the painful consequences which would otherwise have followed his misconduct.

The debauched father transmits a scrofulous constitution to the innocent son, but he pays the penalties of his own debauchery in his own person equally whether he has a son or not. His son's sufferings put him in no better position than he would be in if his son did not suffer. They usually put him in a worse position. An anxious mother saves her child's life at the expense of ruining her own health by watching over it and nursing it; but it is the care, and not the pain, which benefits the child. If the mother's constitution were strong enough to support the same exertions without inconvenience, it would be all the better for the child.

Now, if Butler was willing to use the whole analogy of nature for the purpose of construing the doctrine of the Atonement, if he was willing to say, 'I do not ask you to believe any such doctrine except in so far as it is supported by the analogy of nature, and I admit the force of your objections to all such forms of stating it, and to all such interpretations of the texts of Scripture in which it is announced, as are opposed to, or not confirmed by, the analogy of nature,' he spoke relevantly, though in a way likely to give great offence to many writers of high reputation for orthodoxy. If he meant to say that the analogy of nature confirms the ways of stating the doctrine in question which are generally objected to, he meant to say something which is not the fact.

If the whole of Butler's works, the Sermons and the *Analogy* together, are taken as a substantive

statement on his part, controversially and therefore imperfectly and inconveniently expressed, of his view of things human and divine, we think it must be conceded on the whole to be noble, elevated, and manly, though open to the objections which we have pointed out. The choice of a different form of expression and greater liveliness of temperament would very probably have obviated some of these objections, though they would have surrendered a good deal of popularity and some degree of fame.

There are some faults in Butler which are the faults of his age rather than his own. For instance, his chapter on the particular evidence of Christianity, and the short general sketch which it contains of the history of the world, cannot now be considered as satisfactory. A careful study of this chapter (pt. ii. ch. vii.), and its complete silence upon a great number of the principal historical, scientific, and critical questions which at present occupy the most prominent place in theological controversy, would be of itself enough to meet the observation which is so commonly made in all such discussions, that they contain nothing new, and that all that is urged against common opinions has been answered a hundred times over.

It displays, moreover, in a strong form, another defect which Butler could hardly have avoided, and which it would not be easy to avoid even in the present day. This is the absence of clear views as to the nature of evidence, probability, and belief. The

argument about testimony in favour of miracles, the effect of enthusiasm in perverting accounts of facts, and the frequency with which miraculous stories are invented, ends with an admission that such considerations weaken the force of testimony ; ‘but, notwithstanding all this, human testimony remains still a natural ground of assent, and this assent a natural principle of action.’

Surely we can get a little farther back than this in the matter. It is not human testimony alone, but human testimony, when subjected to certain tests, referring to certain classes of facts, emitted by particular descriptions of persons, that is a natural or rather a reasonable ground of assent. Hundreds of millions of witnesses uniting in the assertion that the sun moves round the earth are liable to be outweighed by one philosopher.

It is not merely upon the question of the value of testimony that Butler’s theory of evidence is unsatisfactory. The fact is, as he fairly avows, that he had no theory at all on the subject. After describing probability as the guide of life, he says: ‘It is not my design to inquire further into the nature of the foundation and measure of probability, or whence it proceeds that likeness should beget that presumption, opinion, and full conviction which the human mind is formed to receive from it, and which it does necessarily produce in every one ; or to guard against the errors to which reasoning from analogy is liable. This belongs to the subject of logic, and is a part of

that subject which has not yet been thoroughly considered.'

As the subject of the whole book is a discourse on the analogy between the constitution and course of nature, and natural and revealed religion, it must be admitted that the absence of any precautions against the abuses of analogical reasoning, and an avowed ignorance of the limits and value of the method itself, are considerable defects even if they were unavoidable.

## XVI

### WARBURTON'S 'DIVINE LEGATION',<sup>1</sup>

THERE are many books of which every one knows the title, and hardly any one knows much more, and though it may often be true that those who do happen to have read such works would find a difficulty in recommending others to follow their example, they may generally extract from them some few observations of general interest. It is in the hope of doing so that we propose to make a few remarks on the book to which Bishop Warburton dedicated so many years of his life, the *Divine Legation of Moses*. It is one of the most singular books that ever was written. Though it is not merely itself a *nominis umbra*, but a member of a class now obsolete, it contains an amount of learning, of ingenuity, and of mental power which has seldom been equalled in any single book, and it illustrates habits of mind, and ways

<sup>1</sup> *The Divine Legation of Moses demonstrated on the Principles of a Religious Deist, from the Omission of the Doctrine of a Future State of Rewards and Punishments in the Jewish Dispensation.* By William Warburton, M.A.



of thinking, which have deeply affected the whole history of England, intellectual and political.

The Church of England has often been praised for its learning, and it has also been largely credited with its liberalism. For a great length of time it was customary to compare it with the Church of Rome on the one hand, and the extreme Protestants on the other, and to contrast with great complacency, the degree in which it had fostered reason and learning, with the antipathy which the Romanists felt for everything which could rival the supreme authority claimed for their Church, and which the Puritans felt for everything which could make their rigid systems appear ungraceful and unnatural.

In this, as in all other boasts, there was no doubt a great deal of hollowness. To claim for the Church of England pre-eminence in these respects is manifestly absurd. It is simply puerile to underrate the learning of the French ecclesiastical writers on the one hand, or that of the Germans on the other; but it is nevertheless quite true that for a long period the Church of England had not merely a strong, but a special and peculiar sympathy, with learning, and that its clergy always enjoyed, as they still enjoy, a remarkable degree of liberty in speculation. No confession of faith leaves so many questions open as the Thirty-nine Articles, and no spiritual courts were ever so little inclined to suppress, or even to meddle with, theological inquiry, as the courts of which those articles are the law. Careful inquiries recently made

disclosed the fact that, between the Restoration and the Gorham case, there were but three or four prosecutions for heresy.

The peculiar character of this alliance between the Church of England and literary criticism and speculation—in other words, the peculiar character of that sort of liberalism which has always been natural to the Church of England—has seldom been better illustrated than in the works of Warburton. Its specific peculiarity consists in arriving at orthodox conclusions upon grounds open to all the world. A learned Roman Catholic has his first principles found for him, and his learning and ingenuity have always had to address themselves to the task of deducing new conclusions from the old principles, or supporting the old assertions by new facts. The stricter kinds of Protestants were confined to the interpretation of the Bible, which they were bound to construe in accordance with their own austere systems. Those who had cast off all definite creeds were, of course, not anxious about the orthodoxy of their conclusions; but the great writers of the Church of England piqued themselves on their orthodoxy, and piqued themselves also on the principle that the Bible was by no means to be taken as the exclusive guide to truth, but was to be illustrated and confirmed by every other kind of knowledge, whether of matters of fact or of matters of speculation.

This is the leading principle of Hooker, and to

this day it has never been entirely dropped out of sight. The consequence has been twofold. On the one hand, Anglican divinity is singularly rich in learned and ingenious apologies, and books on the evidences of religion. On the other hand, Anglican divines, though comparatively free from the failings of dogmatists, are full of the failings of advocates. They show plenty of industry in getting up their briefs, and abundant ingenuity in addressing the jury, but, with some few exceptions, they always hold a brief and address a jury.

Thoroughgoing dogmatists and independent inquirers are not subject to this temptation, though they have doubtless others of their own; but no one will do justice to the peculiar character of English theology who does not bear in mind this its special characteristic. It proceeds on the twofold assumption that certain conclusions are true, and that reason is the proper judge of truth. This explains, amongst other things, the great controversial success of English theology, and the slightness of the hold which many of its most celebrated works have had on the conscience and on the permanent convictions of the nation.

Five-and-twenty years ago it was a common remark that, in the great controversy of the last century, the Divines completely silenced the Freethinkers. This was true in a sense, and in an important sense, yet it was but an advocate's triumph after all. If they had not only answered their opponents, but

found out and set in a full light the whole truth as to the matter in dispute, the controversy would not have broken out again.

Of the advocates who were renowned in the great case of Deism, none was more thoroughgoing or more showy than Warburton. He was more liberal than some of his colleagues (Waterland for instance), and infinitely more voluminous and noisy, though in the long run far less popular, than Butler. It may perhaps be fairly said of him that he was, in theological controversy, very much what a noisy popular leader of a Circuit would be at the Bar. He was immensely ingenious, voluble, vigorous in his use of language, omnivorous in his reading, and pugnacious beyond all bounds of limits.

The notes, of which the later volumes of his great work are full, were called, with considerable humour, his 'customary places of execution,' and the manner in which his unhappy antagonists are dealt with in them amply justified the phrase. The following amenities occur in a few pages: 'Another answerer is ~~yet~~ more shameless.' 'There is a strange perversity in these men.' 'This man' (the author of the Second Book of the Maccabees) 'is such a lover of prodigies that, when he has made a monstrous lie, and so frightened himself at the size of it that he dare not tell it out, he insinuates it.' 'The miserable efforts of these men to evade the force of a little plain sense are deplorable.' 'By the vilest prevarication he repeats,' etc. 'Pretended contradiction, first insisted on by Spinoza,

and through many a dirty channel derived at length to M. Voltaire.'

There is, however, a spirit and vivacity about the whole book which carries the reader on; and the argument itself, to say nothing of the strange collateral topics into which it runs, is in the highest degree characteristic of the author, and of the sort of matter which, as he considered, the interests of the Church for the time being required him to produce.

In common with all the men of his own time who possessed any considerable power of mind, Warburton felt the gravity of the Deistical controversy. Being what and where he was, he also felt a perfectly immeasurable and boundless indignation and contempt for those who had excited it. This appears, amongst other things, from his well-known dedication of the *Divine Legation* to the Freethinkers. It is written in a tone of indignant though suppressed disgust, which shows that Warburton either could not or would not believe in the possibility of an honest doubt on the subject of religion.

His own books, indeed, show little, if they can be said to show any, trace of a calm or large-minded consideration of the subject. They do not give the impression that their author was a good man, or that he had any strong personal feeling of religion. But they show, in every page, a genuine intellectual contempt and dislike for his opponents, and also an unhesitating persuasion, which one may hope was the result of something better than mere personal pride

and self-confidence, that his side was the right one, and that he could show it. He was neither a great artist nor a great philosopher, but he had thought on several of the great subjects of speculation, he had read an enormous number of books, and had an almost unlimited supply of crotchets; and he worked all his opinions, all his reading, and all his crotchets into one enormous mass, which he called a demonstration of the Divine Legation of Moses.

Its general drift, as every one knows, was to show that Moses must have been divinely commissioned to set up the institutions which he gave to the Jews, because he did not teach the doctrine of a future state, which all merely human legislators had found indispensable to their success. The argument is strange enough, but the mere statement of it gives no notion of the book in which it is contained. It fills six octavo volumes; and as Warburton is by no means a lengthy writer, these volumes might be divided into several different treatises, all more or less converging upon or diverging from the main point. We will try to give a general notion of their relation to each other, and of their bearing on the main argument.

The argument itself is stated with much logical exactness and formality, at the very beginning of the book, as follows. It rests upon one postulate—'That a skilful lawgiver, establishing a religion and civil policy, acts with certain views and for certain ends, and not capriciously or without purpose and design.

‘This being granted, we erect our demonstration on these three very clear and simple propositions.

‘1. That to inculcate the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments is necessary to the wellbeing of society.

‘2. That all mankind, especially the most wise and learned nations of antiquity, have concurred in believing and teaching that this doctrine was of much use to civil society.

‘3. That the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments is not to be found in, nor did make part of, the Mosaic dispensation.

‘Propositions so clear and evident, that one would think we might proceed directly to our conclusion that therefore the law of Moses is of Divine origin, all which one or both of the following syllogisms will evince.

‘I. Whatsoever religion and society have no future state for their support must be supported by an extraordinary Providence.

‘The Jewish religion and society had no future state for their support.

‘Therefore the Jewish religion and society were supported by an extraordinary Providence.

‘And again, II. The ancient lawgivers universally believed that such a religion could be supported only by an extraordinary Providence.

‘Moses, an ancient lawgiver, versed in all the wisdom of Egypt; purposely instituted such a religion.

‘Therefore Moses believed his religion was supported by an extraordinary Providence.’

It is worth while to quote this passage at length, because it gives an excellent summary of the argument, and shows how the different parts of the book are linked together. The major proposition of the first syllogism involves a theory of civil society and of its relation to religion. The major of the second syllogism involves a history of all ancient philosophy in so far as it relates to religion and legislation. The minor of each syllogism involves an examination of all the leading parts of the Old Testament in their relation to the New. This shows how vast a field the book was intended to cover, and how natural it was that a man who considered himself capable of conducting such an argument should look upon the mass of mankind as mere pigmies, whose sentiments he was justified in regarding with superb contempt and virtuous horror, if they were at variance with that theory of orthodoxy which so sublime an intellect as his own honoured with its preference.

The first book, which fills nearly half of the first volume, is an essay on the origin of civil society, and the necessity of the doctrine of a future state to its wellbeing. The argument, when condensed in the highest degree, is that civil society can only punish, and that its punishments can apply only to outward actions; that this is not enough to secure its wellbeing, unless there be also some internal sanction by which the thoughts and dispositions of the heart can be directed aright, and that this sanction can be supplied by religion alone.



The doctrine of Cardan and Bayle, that Atheism is not necessarily destructive of morals and civil society, is confuted at considerable length, and by arguments which have still great interest as they apply to Comte as much as to Bayle, though, if they were to be addressed to a modern audience, they would require a complete restatement. Mandeville's paradox about private vices being public benefits is exposed with manly logic and with a force of language which is not much impaired by its occasional brutality ('unheard-of impiety wickedly advanced and impudently avowed,' 'execrable paradox,' 'so corrupt a writer,' 'a writer of such depravity of heart,' etc. etc.) Mandeville deserved some severity, but there was no use in calling him names.

This is the substance of the proof given by Warburton of the first of his three general propositions. Probably few serious thinkers would deny the utility of religion to civil society, and Warburton was, in our opinion, quite right in insisting on the vital importance of the religious sanction to morality. But to say that no civil society could, without a continuous miracle, exist without that sanction is quite another thing; and though that is what Warburton had to prove, his attempt to do so seems to us to have been not only a complete but a ludicrous failure. He hardly seems to have appreciated the difficulty of the undertaking.

The second book is meant to show that, in point of fact, ancient legislation was always founded on

religion. The proof of this is partly direct, and consists in references to cases in which early legislators claimed a divine character, and also to the works of Plato and Cicero, who expressly affirm that religion is the sanction of law. It is partly indirect, and consists in the argument that the character of ancient Paganism was that it was the invention of legislators. You find a systematic theology, he says, in a country like Peru, where there was a government. You find little or none in Canada, where there was no government, yet the Canadian savage was in a more favourable position for inventing a system of natural theology than the Peruvian slave. The religion, therefore, was the invention of the Government. This, with our wider knowledge of early times and of barbarous nations, is easily seen to be a mere piece of ingenuity built upon a slender and mistaken view of the facts. The Canadians had a good deal of religion of a sort, and of a better sort too than the Peruvians. Besides, the whole argument proceeds upon the false hypothesis that there were in those early times philosophic legislators far superior to the mass of mankind, and capable of inventing all these devices, without believing them, for the purpose of government. This is a mere assumption, if it is not to be called a delusion.

Warburton seems to have been sensible of the fact that this part of his case was rather weak, and this led him into one of the most famous and the strangest of all his paradoxes. The ancient mysteries,

he maintained, were 'solely instituted for the propagation and support of the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments'; and, in order to prove this, he maintains at great length, and with much learning and ingenuity, the strange doctrine that the Sixth Book of the *Æneid* is nothing else than 'an initiation into and representation of the theory of the mysteries.' Our readers will no doubt remember the beautiful little essay in which Gibbon combated this wonderful paradox.

Having shown how the ancient magistrates propagated religion, Warburton proceeds to show how they supported it. This is one of the most curious parts of his book, for he maintains that they had Established Churches, though they also tolerated dissenters. 'An established religion with a test law is the universal voice of nature. The most savage nations have employed it to civilise their manners; and the politest knew no other way to prevent their return to barbarity and violence.' Strange as this sounds, it has a certain truth in it, though it may well be doubted whether the ancient religious establishments were not founded on genuine superstition, rather than on any theory about morals or politics. Rome and Athens worshipped particular gods, because the people and the legislators alike believed that these gods really existed, and protected Rome and Athens; not because the Roman and Athenian legislatures wanted to obtain moral and political ends by an imposture.

In the third book, Warburton supports his proposition as to the opinions of antiquity about the doctrine of a future state, by reference to the doctrines of different schools of philosophy, and for that purpose he devotes about three hundred pages to an inquiry into the opinions of the ancient philosophers on the subject of a future life. His inquiries on this subject are very interesting, and are in our judgment by much the most valuable part of the book.

In a very compressed shape, their result is as follows: The ancient philosophers did not believe in a future state of rewards and punishments, and indeed could not do so consistently with two fundamental principles which, in one shape or another, were held by all of them. The first of these principles was, that God cannot be angry, nor hurt any one. The second, that the soul after death is absorbed either into the substance of God or into the substance of the material universe. This is worked out with great care and in minute detail. The ancient philosophers, however, always taught this doctrine, though they did not believe it; and this they did, because they held that truth and utility differed, and that utility, and not truth, was the object of religion. •

In this part of his book Warburton displays in profusion all his great qualities, his learning, his ingenuity, and his vigour; but he also shows that coarseness and want of sympathy with great minds, which led him continually into offensive paradoxes.

There is no doubt a great deal of truth in what he says, and yet every one who reads the book must feel, that it is the work of a man who lived on a different level from the authors of whom he wrote, and was incapable of doing them justice.

There is a certain similarity, but in the last-mentioned particular a curious contrast, between this part of Warburton and one or two of Mr. Charles Merivale's sermons on the Conversion of the Roman Empire. Both lay the same kind of stress on the memorable speech of Cæsar on the conspiracy of Catiline, in which he denied that there was anything to come after death. It must not be supposed that Warburton leaves the matter thus. He argues at length to show that the opinions of the ancient philosophers were ill-founded. He feels, however, that the course which he has taken is a dangerous one for a Christian advocate, inasmuch as it involves an admission that the fundamental doctrines of natural religion (on which, as Warburton always contended, Christianity itself depends) were rejected by the ante-Christian philosophers. He answers this, however, by saying that the additional truths brought to light by Christianity confirmed and explained those partial views of religion which were taken by philosophy. 'The only view of antiquity which gives solid advantage to the Christian cause is such a one as shows natural reason to be clear enough to perceive truth, and the necessity of its deductions when proposed, but not generally strong enough to discover it and

draw right deductions upon it. Just such a view as this I have here given of antiquity.'

To meet the further imputation that he had ascribed the origin of religion to imposture, Warburton enters at great length into the subject of early Paganism, and argues that the original religion was a pure worship of one God, which in course of time was corrupted by idolatry, upon which statesmen and philosophers engrafted, for political reasons, the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, which happened to be true, though they believed it to be false. The intricate ingenuity of all this is thoroughly characteristic of Warburton.

This is, in outline, Warburton's argument on the first of his propositions—the importance and nature of the doctrine of a future state antecedently to Revelation. It is far the most important and interesting part of the work. The rest we may pass over very slightly.

He goes on to show that the doctrine of a future state was not taught to the Jews. The Jews, he says, derived a great part of their polity from the Egyptians, and he accordingly prefaces his inquiry into the Old Testament with a volume of what we should now call *Ægyptology*. This volume is as characteristic as anything that Warburton ever wrote, but it is at present fallen quite out of date, and is moreover exceedingly wearisome. We may therefore pass it over.

The next volume contains an account of the

Jewish constitution as framed by Moses. Its main object is to vindicate the general scheme of that polity against Deistical objections, and to show that there were reasons why it should be framed as it was, and why, though—or rather, as Warburton puts it, because—it was a theocracy, it did not include the doctrine of a future state. It is difficult to put the result of such an argument shortly without injustice, but in a few words it is something like this. The Jewish people were formed by God into a society which was a standing miracle, one of the most remarkable features of which was that, amongst the Jews the Divine commands were sanctioned by temporal rewards and punishments, which proved the superintendence of ‘an extraordinary Providence’ over them, and so preserved for the fulness of time the doctrine of the Divine unity which was to become the source of a new revelation.

This general account of the Jewish constitution is followed by a critical examination of all the passages in the Old Testament which have been supposed to prove that the doctrine of a future state was known to the Jews. This includes a strange argument about the Book of Job, and a still stranger one about the true meaning of the history of the sacrifice of Isaac, each of which furnished the counsel for Dr. Rowland Williams with curious parallels to speculations for which that unfortunate divine was prosecuted before the Court of Arches. Whatever the merits or demerits of Dr.

Williams may have been, he certainly never said anything so odd as what Warburton said about Abraham and Isaac; and there was the strongest resemblance between the way in which the famous Bishop treated Job and that in which the Essayist and Reviewer treated Daniel.

The last volume of the *Divine Legation* was never fully completed. Its object is to state the author's view of the general nature of Christianity, and to show how it fitted on to Judaism. It is a strange and intricate statement, worked in and out and round about in such a complicated way, that it is difficult at times to catch the author's drift, and impossible to do anything like justice to his views in a moderate compass.

Such are the contents of this extraordinary book, which was at once the glory and the torment of a great part of its author's life. It has many faults, but it has one great merit which ought to outweigh many faults. Its author was rash, imperious, paradoxical, abusive; he had, in a word, all the faults of an intemperate advocate; but, on the other hand, he was a reasoner, and not a dogmatist. He never refuses to state, to discuss, and to meet face to face, every objection which can be brought against the creed which he defends, and the particular theory by which he defends it. He never, either in practice or in theory, turns his back upon reason and betakes himself to authority; and this, which was the strength of the Church of England in his day, affords



an impressive and much-needed example to our own.

As to the book itself, the first part contains much that is both curious and true, especially the account of the religious opinions of the ancient philosophers; but the argument, as a whole, is worthless. To say that, if one form of government differs in one important particular from all others, it must be supported by miracle, is childish. Yet this is really all that Warburton tries to prove. If the feeble and intricate chain of reasoning which connects the different parts of the book is struck off, and if the substantial questions treated of are considered in themselves, it must be admitted that they are of the first importance, and that they are even now comparatively unsolved.

What was Paganism?—what was Judaism?—what was the religious belief of the ancient philosophers?—are three questions as vast and as important as any which the mind can entertain; and any one who undertakes the task of solving any one of them ought at least to know what Warburton has written on the subject.

## XVII

### WARBURTON'S MINOR WORKS<sup>1</sup>

WARBURTON'S most important minor works are the *Alliance between Church and State*, the tract on *Julian*, and the *Doctrine of Grace*. Of these, the *Alliance between Church and State*, which 'demonstrates' the necessity and equity of an established religion and a test law, is by far the most important. It is the most popular and famous treatise of the eighteenth century upon the celebrated subject which it handles; and indeed Lord Macaulay, in his review of Mr. Gladstone's book on the subject, says that up to a certain point he agrees with Warburton, though there is a considerable divergency between them, especially on the subject of a test law.

<sup>1</sup> 1. *The Alliance between Church and State; or, the Necessity and Equity of an Established Religion and a Test Law demonstrated.* 2. *Julian; or, a Discourse concerning the Earthquake and Fiery Eruption which defeated the Emperor's attempt to Rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem.* 3. *The Doctrine of Grace; or, the Office and Operations of the Holy Spirit vindicated from the Insults of Infidelity and the Abuses of Fanaticism.*

We cannot agree with Lord Macaulay's view. It seems to us, that Warburton is indefinitely inferior, in his whole conception and treatment of the subject, to the great writers whom he wished to correct. The Presbyterians and Roman Catholics were more thoroughgoing, and Hooker and Hobbes were far more statesmanlike and philosophical.

Warburton appears to us to have spun a sort of sham metaphysical theory out of the facts which he had before him in England, and then to have used the theory to justify the facts. He generalises the Church of England as it was in the first third of the eighteenth century, and then declares that pure science shows that it was the very best of all possible churches. The theory, however, was once so famous that it would be well worth examining, even if its author had been a less considerable man, and if his method had been less characteristic of a mode of thought which had considerable popularity during the early part of the last century—the plan, namely, of arguing upon certain abstract ideas the truth of which was supposed to be self-evident, and which were used with as much confidence as the elementary definitions and axioms of geometry.

Samuel Clarke's demonstration of the existence and attributes of God is perhaps the best specimen of this method, and its influence is to be traced, amongst other writers, in Butler. Warburton's works are full of it. Such expressions as 'fit,' 'fitness of things' (which occur in some of Lord Mansfield's

judgments), 'nature,' and the like, are characteristic of it; and no doubt its popularity was due principally to the enormous success which had rewarded its employment in its proper sphere by Newton.

In dealing with certain objections to his theory at the end of his book, Warburton notices, amongst others, the objection that it does not agree with fact, upon which he observes: 'A right theory of nature is to be obtained only by pursuing fact, for God is the author of that system; but in a theory of politics, which is an artificial system, to follow fact is no certain way to truth, because man is the author of that system. Abstract ideas and their general relations are the guides that lead us into truth, and fact hath with good reason but a subsidiary use. As therefore the method to be pursued is different, so should the judgment be which is passed upon it; the goodness of the theory being estimated, not according to its agreement with fact, but right reason. In the former case the theory should be regulated by the fact; in the latter, the fact by the theory.'

Such being his view of the method proper for such inquiries, he sets out to investigate the relations between Church and State by deducing from right reason and abstract ideas the legitimate functions of each—a process which comes, in fact, to stating in general terms the truth of that which he is afterwards going to state in specific terms.

He begins, like Hobbes, with describing the state of nature, which he says would have been very much

what Hobbes represented it to be, 'was it not for the restraining principle of religion,' which, however, 'could not operate with sufficient efficacy . . . for want of a common arbiter.' The result of this was 'endless jar,' which comes to much the same as Hobbes's state of war.

Society was invented as a remedy for this, but was found to be inefficient for a variety of reasons. It could only punish, and that for open transgressions. It could not enforce duties of imperfect obligation, though it increased the number of such duties, and also increased the wants which are the springs of human action. The reason why society could not reward was that, 'in entering into society, it was stipulated between the magistrate and people that protection and obedience should be reciprocal conditions. When, therefore, a citizen obeys the laws, that debt on society is discharged by the protection it affords him.' No reward is due for obedience, and nothing beyond obedience can be given. On the other hand, it was necessary that disobedience should be followed, not merely by loss of protection, but by punishment, for otherwise society could not subsist. Hence 'it was stipulated that the transgressor should be subject to pecuniary mulcts, corporal castigations, mutilation of members, and capital inflictions.'

Warburton is so precise about the terms of the social contract that one would think it must have been drawn up in the attorney's office at Newark in which he served his articles. Society not only did

not, but could not, reward, because it could not judge of men's motives, or 'ever find a fund sufficient for that purpose.' Hence religion had to be called in.

Having begun with this curiously meagre and arbitrary account of the origin of civil society, Warburton goes on to consider its nature. 'To suppose its end the vague purpose of acquiring all possible accidental good is, in politics, a mere solecism.' It must then 'be allowed to have been invented for the attainment of some certain end or ends exclusive of others.' This end is 'security to the temporal liberty and property of man.' Civil society alone could produce this. 'The salvation of souls or the security of man's future happiness' belongs to religion, and civil society has nothing to do with it. The means to this end are 'doctrine and morals, which compose what is called religion in the largest sense of the word.' Hence 'they were the bodies, not the souls, of men of which the magistrate undertook the care. Whatever, therefore, refers to the body is in his jurisdiction; whatever to the soul is not.' Still the civil magistrate could not protect even the body without power; power could be given only by consent, which could be permanently secured only by an oath; and an oath implied a belief in 'the three fundamental principles of natural religion—namely, the being of a God, his providence over human affairs, and the natural essential difference of good and evil.' These three principles, therefore, the civil magistrate was

carefully to protect, as they gave to all civil laws a general religious sanction.

The nature and end of religion next come to be considered. Its end is 'to procure the favour of God,' and 'to advance and improve our own intellectual nature.' External worship is essential to this, and external worship implies a creed and profession of it as a term of communion. The object of a religious society is to put these things into order. Hence the religious and the civil society have distinct aims and spheres, each being sovereign in its own.

Their sovereignty is proved thus. If not sovereign, they would be dependent, and this dependency must be either by the law of nature, or else by the law of nations. Now there is no dependency by the law of nature, because that dependency 'is from essence or generation'; whereas here there is an essential difference between the two, and therefore no essential dependency. There is no dependency by the law of nations, for dependency by the law of nations is where, 'one and the same people composing two different societies, the *imperium* of the one clashes with the *imperium* of the other.' In that case the less society becomes dependent on the greater, because this is the only way to avoid that great absurdity in politics called *imperium in imperio*.'

But the civil and religious societies have different ends and means; therefore they cannot meet and cannot clash. The religious society thus constituted 'hath not in and of itself any coercive power of the

civil kind,' though it can excommunicate, which the State cannot, because it has nothing to do with the sphere of religious society.

Having thus got his two independent societies, Warburton proceeds to ally them. As civil society can provide only for the body, and religious society only for the soul, the two together can provide for both. Hence the necessity of an alliance. But as each society is sovereign and independent, the alliance must be 'by free convention and mutual compact.' Therefore it was so made.

The motives of the magistrate were to preserve the essence and purity of religion, to improve its influence, and to prevent the mischief which it might do if left alone. Religion without the help of the magistrate would get on, Warburton thinks, very ill, for it will run into superstition and fanaticism which will be revered by the people as sanctity; 'but now the civil magistrate being become protector of the Church, and consequently supreme head and director of it, the ministry is much in his power; that mutual dependency between the clergy and people so pernicious to the State being, by means of a settled revenue, broken and destroyed.'

The motive of the Church for the alliance was 'security from all exterior violence,' and this was the only motive. Two others, says Warburton, in a passage which reads like a satire, might be imagined—namely, 'to engage the State to propagate the established religion by force,' and 'to bestow honours,



riches, and power upon it.' Yet the first of these motives would be unjust, and the second impertinent. 'It is impertinent in a church to aim at riches, honours, powers; because these are things which, as a religious society, she can neither use nor profit by.' The motives of the clergy might in fact be more or less of this kind, 'but the Church as a religious society consists of the whole body of the community, both laity and clergy, and her motive, we say, could not be riches, honours, and power, because they have no natural tendency to promote the ultimate end of this society, salvation of souls, or the immediate end, purity of worship. We conclude, therefore, that the only legitimate motive she could have was security and protection from outward violence.'

We come at last to the terms of the alliance :

1. The Church engaged to help the State to the utmost.

2. The Church gave up its independency to the State; being the weaker of the two.

In consideration of which the Church receives—

1. A public endowment for its ministers.

2. A place for her superior members in the Court of Legislature. As the State is to make laws for the Church, the Church as such should be represented.

3. Ecclesiastical Courts, with coercive authority for the reformation of manners. It is worth notice, by the way, that, in a long investigation of this matter, Warburton takes occasion to pronounce a

strong opinion in favour of divorce ; ' though the voice of nature and the oracles of God concurred to pronounce in some cases, as in adultery, a divorce,' etc.

The State receives supremacy in matters ecclesiastical, which consists of three branches.

1. No ecclesiastic of the Established Church can exercise his function without the magistrate's approbation and allowance.

2. No convocation, synod, or church assembly hath a right to sit without the express permission of the magistrate ; nor, when they do sit by virtue of that permission, to proceed in a judiciary or legislative manner without a special licence for that purpose ; nor to impose their acts as authoritative till they have received his confirmation.

3. No member of the Established Church can be excommunicated or expelled the society without the consent and allowance of the magistrate.

After this we are not much surprised to learn that : ' In England alone the original terms of this convention are kept up so exactly that this account of the alliance between Church and State seems rather a copy of the Church and State of England *than a theory, as indeed it was, formed solely on the contemplation of nature and the invariable reason of things, and had no further regard to our particular Establishment than as some part of it tended to illustrate these abstract reasonings.*'

As for the test law, that is necessary to secure the

Church chosen for establishment, as to which, says Warburton, 'if there be more than one at the time of the convention, the State allies itself with the largest.' Otherwise the Dissenters would pull it to pieces. The test law is equitable, because no man has a right to office. If he had such a right, it would not be against the law of nature to abridge it; and even if it were against the law of nature, then the law of nature may be overruled for the public good.

Such is the gist of this celebrated book separated from a good deal of miscellaneous matter, part of which consists of a most characteristic controversy with Rousseau, which is full of wit and vigour, but, in parts, outrageously coarse.

As to the general argument of the book itself, with the author's wonderful machinery about the end of civil government and the end of religion, and dependency by the law of nature, and dependency by the law of nations, and so forth, we need say very little. The whole method appears to us fundamentally wrong. The original compact, the law of nature and nations, the end of civil government, and the rest, are mere fictions, not without their use in certain respects, but altogether misleading when used as Warburton uses them.

His theory is that A, B, C, and D, having formed themselves into a civil society for the prevention of violence, and having also formed themselves into a religious society for the purpose of worship, contracted with themselves, in the capacity of State, to give up

to themselves, in that capacity, all the rights which they had conferred on themselves in the capacity of Church, in consideration that, in the capacity of State, they would protect themselves in the capacity of Church, from that very violence, from which it was the object of their associating themselves together in the capacity of State, to protect themselves at all events. Certainly the appetite of the Church for protection from violence would appear to have been perfectly insatiable.

*Julian* is perhaps even a more singular performance than the *Alliance*. Its title is '*Julian: or, a Discourse concerning the Earthquake and Fiery Eruption which defeated the Emperor's attempt to Rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem; in which the reality of a divine interposition is shown; the objections to it are answered, and the nature of that evidence which demands the assent of every reasonable man to a miraculous fact is considered and explained.*'

The essay is an attempt to establish the truth of the specific miracle in question, and to give, in connection with it, a general theory of miracles. The theory is shortly this: Julian attempted to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem. His workmen were stopped in their task by fire from heaven, succeeded by a fiery eruption from the excavations, and an earthquake. At the same time there appeared in the air a cross in a circle, and the clothes of the bystanders were marked with crosses.

The greater part of the tract, which fills two hundred

quarto pages, is occupied by a minute examination of the evidence on the subject, of which, even if it were at all worth while, it would be difficult to give an account in a short compass. The principal witnesses are Ammianus Marcellinus; some ecclesiastical historians, as Socrates and Sozomenes, who lived long afterwards; Ambrose and Chrysostom, who mention the matter very briefly, and of whom Ambrose was living at a distance; and Gregory Nazianzen, who gives a full account of the matter, and was in the neighbourhood at the time.

The singular part of the matter is not the discussion of their accounts, which is conducted at immense length and with that profusion of minute commentary which is the curse of polemical argument, but the view which Warburton himself arrives at. The fire, he says, was lightning; and, with his usual love of omnifarious learning, he shows 'how a fiery eruption must occasion a previous earthquake, and this earthquake a stormy sky; that air put into a violent motion always produces lightning when it abounds with matter susceptible of inflammation.'

As for the cross in the sky, 'it was neither more nor less than one of those meteoric lights which are not unfrequently seen in solar or lunar halos.' The crosses on the clothes were a natural effect of the lightning, as to which Warburton collects a variety of curious stories of similar phenomena in modern times, where there was no suggestion of a miracle. The eruption from the earth probably

proceeded from inflammable matter in the earth where the workmen were digging. Gregory, it seems, made less of the eruption and more of the lightning than Ammianus.

Where then, asks the reader in surprise, was the miracle? Not, says Warburton, where the Fathers thought it was. The halo, the crosses, and the lightning were all natural. The eruption was the true miracle, and the particular miraculous circumstance was that 'the breath of the Lord kindled . . . the mineral and metallic substances' which 'were the native contents of the place from whence the flames issued.' The other circumstances came in as appropriate moral emblems by way of a sort of setting for the miracle; but the true genuine miracle itself was the setting of a supernatural match to the pre-existing sulphur, or whatever it was, just at the moment when a great moral effect would be produced.

Warburton goes at great length into the whole subject and theory of miracles, about which he appears to have had as much private information as he possessed about the terms of the marriage-settlement between the Church and the State. There are three distinct kinds of miracles—those where the laws of nature are suspended or reversed; those in which a new direction is given to the laws of nature; and 'yet a third, compounded of the other two, where the laws of nature are in part arrested and suspended, and in part differently directed.' All these different kinds of miracles have

to be criticised on different principles, and by the judicious application of them, we are able to form a very probable conjecture as to the important question whether God created the inflammable elements for the purpose, or used 'those which lay ready stored up' (having been created, we suppose, by some other than divine agency) 'against the day of visitation.'

By reading such speculations, and comparing them with the author's not less grotesque account of the relations of Church and State, we are able to form a notion of the sort of world in which the schoolmen lived. There is something almost sublime in the pedantry of a man who could gravely sit down and spin cobwebs of this sort out of his own brain, with the fullest conviction that he was engaged in a most important avocation, and that he really was arriving at results of lasting importance.

The *Doctrine of Grace* is a different sort of book from either the *Alliance* or *Julian*. It is much less paradoxical, though it has some special paradoxes of its own, if they were worth examining. Its object is to measure out to mankind just that amount of belief in the operations of divine grace on their own souls, and the souls of others, which they must recognise under pain of being infidels, and which they must on no account exceed on pain of being fanatics.

In pursuance of this design, Warburton first attacks Conyers Middleton for having undervalued the miracle of the Day of Pentecost, from which he takes occasion to inquire into the nature of the inspiration of the

Bible. He advances upon this subject a strange fast and loose theory which is characteristically intricate and gratuitous. The Bible, he says, is entirely true in important points, but is only partially inspired; which theory, as he observes, 'answers all the ends of a Scripture universally and organically inspired, by producing an unerring rule of faith and manners, and besides obviates all those objections to inspiration which arise from the too high notion of it'—a great convenience, no doubt, yet not exactly a proof of its truth.

After this he proceeds to examine the immediate operations of divine power in producing sensible or mental miracles. As to the sensible miracles, he contrives to find in the passage 'Charity never faileth, but whether there be prophecies they shall fail,' etc.—a proof that miracles were to cease with the first ages of the Church; and he then betakes himself to the really celebrated part of the book, his attack upon Wesley. It certainly is entitled to the praise of being in its way as trenchant and savage an attack upon the Methodists as it was possible to make. It is very like Sydney Smith's well-known article in the *Edinburgh Review* long afterwards. It is one of those performances which will provide a person, predisposed to attack the Methodists, with proper arms for the purpose, but there is nothing in it which is in the least degree calculated to operate on the minds of the persons who are attacked. It is inconceivable that any single person should ever have been



converted to Warburton's or Sydney Smith's way of thinking by such performances.

We have given a sketch of Warburton's minor works because they set his peculiarities in a broader light than his great work. They afford little opportunity for that vigorous mode of handling great masses of knowledge which is the best feature in the *Divine Legation*. But they forcibly display his love of paradox, his strange intricacy of mind, and the passionate delight which he took in resting his case on some issue so refined and unexpected, that probably not one reader in a hundred ever takes the trouble to understand his meaning properly.

## XVIII

### THE MISCELLANEOUS WORKS OF CONYERS MIDDLETON<sup>1</sup>

FEW parts of our literature are better known by name, or less frequently read, than the books which contain the great moral and religious controversies of the eighteenth century. It is the habit of every successive champion of orthodoxy to repeat, with triumphant variations, the song of triumph which Burke sang, in his *Reflections on the French Revolution*, over the early Deists. 'We too have had writers of that description, who made some noise in their day. At present they repose in lasting oblivion. Who, born within the last forty years, has read one word of Collins, and Toland, and Tindal, and Chubb, and Morgan, and that whole race who called themselves Freethinkers? Who now reads Bolingbroke? Who ever read him through? Ask the booksellers of London what is become of these lights of the world?'

<sup>1</sup> *The Miscellaneous Works of the late Reverend and Learned Conyers Middleton, D.D.* 5 vols.

This is, no doubt, true to a great extent, though less true now than it was in 1790 ; but the questions ought to be carried further, if even justice is to be done. Who, born within the last forty years, has read those who answered the eighteenth-century Deists? The answers of the London booksellers to such questions would probably not be very favourable to these lights of the world. The truth is, that mere controversy must be ephemeral, however ably it is conducted. It is at best but pamphleteering. After a time, the soldiers on each side retreat, and leave the stage clear for a younger generation. The books which live are those which either rise to the height of real philosophy, like Hobbes and Butler ; which add something to our knowledge of matters of fact, like Lardner or Gibbon ; or which have the good fortune to answer some immediate practical purpose, as, for instance, by becoming University text-books, like Paley's *Evidences*.

It is, however, anything but true that the booksellers' test is the one by which the importance of controversy is to be measured. The controversies themselves, and the books in which they are embodied, by degrees die away and are forgotten, but their effects are permanent. They model the opinions and influence the conduct of thousands, nay of millions, who have never read a single word of them.

It is easy to ask, with superb contempt, who reads Bolingbroke, and who ever read him through? The answer is, Voltaire read Bolingbroke. The French

nation read Voltaire to some purpose for a good many years. The most orthodox of mankind read, at all events, Sir Archibald Alison's *History of the French Revolution*; the least orthodox read Strauss and Renan; and each party reads the Pope's Encyclical Letter, and the eighty-four propositions which it condemns.

With facts like these before us, Burke's questions look less impressive than they did when he set the fashion of asking them. It is very true that, when we look into old controversies, we find a discussion of the questions of our own time under rather different conditions, but it is equally true that this increases instead of diminishing their interest. Nothing can help us to understand the nineteenth century better than some familiarity with the writers of the eighteenth.

Hardly any writer of that century attracted more attention in his time than Dr. Conyers Middleton. The names of his principal works are still sufficiently well known, though, with the exception of the *Life of Cicero*, they are probably little read; still no one who has a taste for controversy, and who takes up the *Free Inquiry* or the *Letter from Rome*, and their respective appendices, is likely to stop till he has read them through.

They are for the most part excellently written, for, notwithstanding the reproaches which have often been bestowed upon him for flippancy and want of reverence, Middleton always wrote both

like a gentleman and like a good man. He is certainly severe enough on his antagonists, but he never abuses, and hardly ever sneers at them. The severity of his style consists entirely in the quiet and easy way in which he meets his antagonists; and the flippancy with which he is often taxed will be found on examination to be nothing else than a quiet indifference to the rank and station of his opponent, or to the popularity of the opinions which he is attacking.

Altogether his style is a model of well-bred, educated criticism. He says just what he means, no more and no less. He never gets in a passion, and hardly ever goes even the length of irony. Still, such is the clearness and neatness of his style that the mere statement of his opinions, and the grounds on which he held them, is incomparably more effective than the vehemence of such a writer as Warburton, and even than the rather affected irony of Berkeley.

Good as is Middleton's style, the position which he held in English literature and the substance of his principal controversial works are more important. The present generation has almost forgotten, in its ignorant alarm at a few contemporary writers, how strong a current of what in the present day would be called liberalism, ran through the ecclesiastical literature of England for more than two centuries, from the days of Hooker to those of Bishop Horsley. Indeed, for obvious reasons, we are not so familiar as

we might be with the fact that theologians were for a great length of time the most prominent of English literary men, and that during a considerable part of its history the Church might, without presumption, claim the position of the intellectual teacher of the nation at large.

This growth and progress of religious liberalism in the Church of England would be an excellent subject for a book. Such a work would begin by showing how—as against the claims of the Pope to infallibility, and the claim of the Calvinists to make the letter of the Bible a guide in every action of life, to the exclusion of every other source of knowledge—Hooker was led to ascribe to reason much higher functions and greater importance than were conceded to it by either of his antagonists.

This would lead to a consideration of the divines of Charles I.'s time, in whose writings there may be traced a sympathetic antipathy to liberalism, not unlike that which is to be seen in the present day, though of course the form in which it appears is different. Their theories led them to attach extreme importance to the doctrines of the early Church, and their tone of mind led some of them—Laud, for instance, and, to some extent, Jeremy Taylor—to sympathise with the ascetic and mortified view of life. On the other hand, the study of antiquity implied reasoning and criticism, and the nature of the case excluded appeals to any specific embodiment of infallibility.

Hence, in the literature and history of that time there may be found, on the one hand, what we should consider bigoted and superstitious views of human life in general, and, on the other, passages of a speculative kind, pointing to the theories of our own time. Laud, for instance, is praised by Clarendon for the zeal with which he upheld Church discipline. 'Persons of honour and great quality were every day cited into the High Commission Court upon the fame of their incontinence, and were there prosecuted, to their shame as well as punishment.' Laud 'intended the discipline of the Church should be felt as well as spoken of.' Yet Laud was the patron and friend of Hales and Chillingworth, and they were the first maintainers of the cardinal doctrine of all religious liberalism—that error is not in itself of the nature of sin.

Hammond, again, was one of the most saintly of men, yet his paraphrase of the New Testament contains passages precisely similar to those which are considered so shocking in our own days. For instance, his explanation of the miracle of the Pool of Bethesda is rationalising in the highest degree. The pool itself, he considers, was the receptacle of the offal and drainage from the Temple sacrifices; and the angel who troubled the water was, in his view, a sort of beadle occasionally sent to stir it up, so that the sick who were in attendance might get the full benefit of the savoury fluid.

Of Jeremy Taylor it is enough to say that he was

the author both of the *Holy Living and Dying* and of the *Liberty of Prophesying*; and there are passages in Baxter which prove that, in his case at all events, there was no opposition between the most intensely devotional spirit and a vigour of criticism which condemned in express terms the morality of important parts of the Old Testament.

Towards the beginning of the eighteenth century a more cheerful view of life in general, and a less ascetic theory of morals, may be traced in a considerable number of our most eminent divines. Tillotson is perhaps the leading figure in this new generation, but, as every one knows, he did not stand alone. From Tillotson the inquiry which we have suggested would pass (mentioning only the principal names) through Berkeley, Warburton, Middleton, Paley, Hey, and Horsley, nor would there be any difficulty in carrying it on to our own times.

The common characteristics of this school, gradually but surely developed, are in the main three. First, a belief that natural religion is the foundation on which revelation must rest, and which is presupposed by it; secondly, a constantly increasing confidence in the use of the critical faculty; and, thirdly, a growing belief in what may be called the human theory of morals—the theory, that is, that morality rests upon a base of its own, and is antecedent to, and independent of, revelation. The application of this last principle both to politics and to common life, is the very essence of modern liberalism, and, if the Pope had wished to sum



up in a few lines all the eighty-four propositions which his syllabus has condemned, he would probably have singled it out as the net result of all modern heresy.

The place which Middleton occupies in this long progress is a remarkable one for several reasons, and especially, because some of the controversies of our own day have invested with a fresh interest the particular points to which his attention was specially directed. His *Letter from Rome*, which went through several editions in his lifetime, was first published in 1729; and his *Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers which are supposed to have existed in the Christian Church from the Earliest Ages, through several successive Centuries*, was first published at the end of 1748.

One circumstance which is calculated to surprise the reader in each of these works is the tone in which they are written. We are generally accustomed in the present day to look upon the early part of the eighteenth century—the interval between the silencing of Convocation and the rise of Methodism—as the most irreligious part of our history, and in particular we are very apt to suppose that the controversy between Protestants and Roman Catholics had almost entirely gone to sleep. So far is this from being the case that Middleton, in his *Introductory Discourse to the Free Inquiry*, says, ‘I found myself particularly excited to this task by what I had occasionally observed and heard of the late growth of Popery in this Kingdom, and the great number of Popish books which have been printed and published amongst us within these few years.’

It is perhaps still more singular to find him frequently referring to the use which the Papists made of the argument that miracles were worked in attestation of their doctrines, and of no others, and to the effect of that argument on the minds of ordinary Protestants. He describes it as the popular argument in the controversies of the day. The great object of his writings is to oppose and overthrow it, and the method which he takes is sufficiently well known.

The *Letter from Rome* contains an elaborate and curious parallel between Popish and heathen practices and miracles. He shows how the incense, the holy water, the image-worship, the festivals, the processions, the shrines, and the local deities or saints of the two systems resemble each other in details, which are at times surprisingly minute and characteristic, and he gives from the classics exact parallels for all the most striking Popish miracles. They certainly do repeat each other with wonderful minuteness. For instance, the images in the churches, alleged to have been brought from heaven by angels, are just like the image of Diana of the Ephesians; the weeping Madonnas match the weeping statue of Apollo mentioned in Livy; and the blood of Januarius is the legitimate successor of the frankincense which Horace saw at Gnatia on the road to Brundisium :

Gnatia <sup>•</sup>lymphis

Iritis exstructa dedit risusque jocosque, ●  
Dum flammâ sine thura liquescere limine sacro  
Persuadere cupit.

The parallel is so managed as never to fatigue the reader, and is admirably ingenious throughout.

The *Free Inquiry* is a criticism of the various miracles which are supposed to have occurred in the early Christian Church. Middleton argues very shortly, but in a very powerful manner, that—unless they rest, as most of them do, on remote hearsay evidence—they are merely exaggerated accounts of natural events; that the witnesses who attest them were grossly ignorant and credulous, and in some instances positively dishonest; in short, that, tried by the ordinary rules of evidence, they are altogether unworthy of credit. The most curious thing about the book, is that this was considered at that time as a dreadful and impious paradox, though in the present day there is probably no Protestant writer who thinks himself in the least degree concerned to defend the authority of these accounts, and though the defence set up for them by such a writer as Dr. Newman implies an admission that the evidence on which they rest is altogether unsatisfactory, except to minds pre-disposed to believe them.

The interest of these books in our day lies in their relation to the controversies which excite so much attention amongst ourselves. Spirit-rapping, the Brothers Davenport, Mr. Home, and Dr. Newman's *Apologia*, have given to Middleton's inquiries a degree of interest which did not attach to them some years ago.

It is worth while to describe the true state

of the controversy. The great argument against Middleton always was that he could not draw the line between the miracles of apostolic times and those of succeeding ages. In his *Book of the Roman Catholic Church*, Mr. Charles Butler said that the Roman Catholics viewed the controversy with satisfaction, because Middleton's antagonists could not answer his challenge to show a time at which miracles had stopped; whereas Middleton could not answer their challenge to draw a line between the Apostles and the Fathers. Hence they inferred that Dr. Middleton and his critics proved, between them, either that the miracles of all ages must be believed, or that the miracles of the Gospels could not be believed.

This is precisely the same way of arguing as is used by their successors in the present day. It is the favourite argument, for instance, of Dr. Newman. Middleton's tracts are valuable as suggesting, though they do not state as clearly as might be desirable, two separate answers to it, each of which is conclusive.

The first answer is, that accounts of miracles, like all other historical statements, must be believed or not upon evidence. Destroy the weight of the evidence, and you destroy the belief. When, therefore, in answer to arguments destroying the weight of the evidence for the removal of the Holy House of Loretto, it is said that the evidence of the Christian miracles is no better, this is an argument against the

Christian miracles, and can be good only in the mouth of those who do not believe them, or (which is much the same) are determined to believe them whether true or not.

The more the popular dilemma is examined, the more clearly will it appear that this is its true character. If the Christian miracles are true, if they really did occur as stated in the Gospels, the argument loses all its force. In that case the arguments of Lardner and Paley will prevail over those of Strauss and Renan. If, on the other hand, those who rely upon the dilemma in question are right in thinking that all the argument and all the evidence are against the truth of the Gospel history—if upon examination of all the antecedent probabilities of the case, and of all the positive subsequent testimony, it appears that there is no more reason to believe in the Resurrection than there is to believe in the House of Loretto—why should we believe in the Resurrection?

Once grasp the principle that the supposition that a creed is true is the only conceivable ground upon which any reasonable person can believe in it, and all attempts to put Popish and Christian miracles on the same ground appear at once in their true character. They are nothing but attacks on the Christian miracles. Suppose a man had his whole fortune in his pocket in the shape of a bundle of bank-notes, and discovered several of them to be forged, what should we think of a judicious friend who advised him to pass them all and ask no questions, inasmuch as he was inclined

to think that they were all struck from one die? If such stories are to be believed, the important thing to prove is that they are true, and not that they are mixed up with other opinions which those who attack them believe to be true.

Before a man can have a right to urge the dilemmas which Butler proposes, he must entitle himself to do so by affirming on his own account, and as the expression of his own opinion, that the truth of the Gospel history is opposed to the strongest antecedent probability; that it is attested only by hearsay evidence given by witnesses who had a strong motive for making the statements of which it is composed, and a natural predisposition to believe or invent marvellous stories; and that the miracles themselves are mere wonders, like conjurors' tricks, neither calculated to produce, nor in point of fact productive of, any important or permanent effects, and indistinguishable from many others admitted to be forgeries. For it is upon these grounds that Middleton and other Protestants deny the truth of ecclesiastical miracles in general.

A man who, having made all these admissions about the Christian miracles, nevertheless professes to believe them, would certainly be consistent in believing the Popish miracles as well; but, unless he makes these admissions, he is always open to the observation that, on his principles, the fact that there may be evidence enough to prove the occurrence of an extraordinary event, proves that there are no tests by

which we can estimate the probability of any event whatever.

Middleton's arguments, however, suggest a second answer to the dilemma in question, which leads, by a somewhat different road, to precisely the same result. There can be no sort of doubt, and it is not even denied by any advocate of ecclesiastical miracles, that there are numerous accounts of miracles, elsewhere than in the Romish Church, which rest on evidence at least as good as those of any saint in the calendar.

To say nothing of Greek saints, the best attested of all miracles in modern times are those which were worked at the tomb of the Abbé Paris, the Jansenist. These miracles were worked in direct opposition to the Bull Unigenitus, and in support of the last great heresy over which, as Dr. Newman tells us, the Church of Rome has triumphed.

This, however, is only a single instance. It is common ecclesiastical learning that heretics at times work miracles, and even pagans. Fleury, for instance, with perfect confidence, tells the following story about Simon Magus in his controversy with St. Peter. 'Simon likewise promised to fly and ascend the skies, *which he effectually did, being carried up by evil spirits*; but St. Peter and St. Paul, kneeling, prayed together, and invoked the name of Jesus, which having terrified the devils, they abandoned Simon, who fell down to the ground, and remained stretched out with his legs broken. He then was carried away to another place,

where, not being able to endure his pains, nor the shame he felt, he cast himself down a precipice'—which, by the way, implies a third miracle, 'as his legs were broken; unless, indeed, he waited till he got well, and then threw himself down because of the past pain.

To say nothing of the prodigies in Livy and other ancient writers, look at our own times. The feats of Mr. Home and the Brothers Davenport are far better authenticated than those of the great mass of saints. Indeed, any one who has an appetite for such things may find in Mr. Howitt's *History of the Supernatural* any quantity of miracles, in all ages and countries, and worked by men of all sorts of religions, and of no religion at all, all of which are authenticated in much the same sort of way. Those, therefore, who called upon Middleton to draw the line between the Gospel miracles and those of the early Fathers, might themselves be asked, with equal justice, to draw the line between the blood of Januarius and the Brothers Davenport. To do them justice, they do not shrink from the task, and answer much to the purpose.

• A few weeks ago a leading Roman Catholic newspaper gave an account of the Davenport Brothers, and expressed an opinion that the things done were miracles wrought by the Devil. This, indeed, is the answer always given in such cases. 'Miracles are worked in our Church—believe, therefore, that ours is the true Church.'—'Yes; but they are worked in



all sorts of other bodies.'—'True; but the Devil works them.'—'Why does the Devil work these miracles more than yours?'—'Because ours is the true Church.'—'And why is yours the true Church?'—'Because miracles are worked in it.' It is obvious from this that a test of truth independent of miracles must be found, unless we are content to go on trundling this circular argument indefinitely.

It seems almost absurd, in this age of the world, to draw attention to arguments so old and so plain; but any one who considers the way in which people, who never think conscientiously or laboriously, but only by little bits, talk about great moral and religious problems, will understand the necessity for going over again in a popular form what is really a very old story.

To speak the language of old-fashioned sermons, there are two descriptions of persons who infest society in the present day, and whose fallacies it is eminently desirable to expose as far as possible. There is the clever, ignorant, flashy kind of man who, without any depth of character, hovers about between being an Atheist and being a Papist, with no real belief at all in his mind, but with a great appetite for the pleasures which are to be had in each character.

On the one hand, such a man finds it easy, in virtue of his atheistical proclivities, to sympathise to the greatest possible extent with all speculations of an unorthodox kind. He has not the least objection

to know all about them, to canvass them, rather to patronise and favour them, and to admit with charming simplicity and candour that, as against the world at large, and ordinary Englishmen in particular, they are altogether unanswerable.

On the other hand, in his sentimental moments—for instance, if he is talking to a woman—he can always fall back upon his other order of ideas, and expatiate on faith and on the divine majesty and beauty of the Church—‘*Vera incessu patuit Dea.*’ This practice of hunting with the hounds of reason, and running with the hare of faith, is becoming very common, and is in reality a thin disguise for the most dishonest of all forms of scepticism—a form more dishonest than downright conscious lying, because a man who lies consciously at least tells himself that he does lie, and has therefore a notion in his own mind as to what the truth is; whereas the habit in question is really nothing else than a radical disbelief in truth itself—an unconscious poisoning of the very sources of truth.

Another form of the same disease is what may be described as its pathetic variety. This occurs in people who really do feel what the other class only pretend to feel. Instead of hovering between Atheism and Popery, they fly for refuge to Popery from Atheism, and hug its chains, not because they really believe it to be true, but because they think that a desperate determination to do so is their best chance of not being compelled to believe Atheism.

This is just as dishonest a frame of mind as the

other, and for the same reason. Indeed, the only difference between the two is a difference of temperament. It is surprising to see how popular these ways of viewing religion are becoming. It is, indeed, very unlikely that they will ever prevail widely amongst a really honest, laborious, and strong-minded people ; but there can be no doubt that many weak-spirited people will fall a prey to the one temptation, and many careless, ignorant, noisy men—who happen, as such men often have, to have a soft place about them—to the other.

If experience had not put the fact beyond all possibility of doubt, it might have seemed surprising that mankind should yet have to learn that the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, is the one thing needful to be believed ; and that, of all pestilent inventions, none is more deadly and soul-destroying than a contrivance for enabling men to believe a thing whether it is true or not. Few errors are so injurious that it would not be better to hold them in good faith, and because they were honestly believed to be true, than to hold even the most important truths upon any other terms. It is sad to think how much theology in our days, whether Protestant or Popish, holds out to its disciples this great inducement : Come to me, all ye that are weary of doubt, and I will give you security that, if your creed is false, you shall be the last to discover it.

## XIX

### HUME'S ESSAYS<sup>1</sup>

OF Dr. Arnold's sayings, few are entitled to more attention than that which described the eighteenth century as the 'great misused seed-time of modern Europe.' The word 'misused' was perhaps one which Dr. Arnold's acquirements scarcely justified him in using, and it has about it an air of clerical disapprobation, which jars upon the mind in reading a criticism on a period so important in the history of mankind.

A good deal more of that history must pass away before we shall be able to say whether the eighteenth century did or did not misuse its opportunities; and, at all events, a man ought to be profoundly acquainted with a considerable number of difficult subjects before he is in a position to say precisely how, in point of fact, those opportunities were used.

<sup>1</sup> *Essays and Treatises on several Subjects.* By David Hume, Esq. 2 vols.

Voltaire may perhaps be taken as the best representative of the feelings of one section of one of the most important of European nations during this period, and Hume is hardly less fit to stand as the type of the corresponding school of thought in another. The position of Hume in Scotland had many points of resemblance to that of Voltaire in France, though it had also points of contrast at least as important and characteristic. Each was the severest critic of the existing state of belief, especially of religious belief, in his time and country. Each had a strong practical turn of mind, of which he never lost sight, even in the most abstract speculations. Each was a sincere Deist in his own way, though each had rejected Christianity on the same ground.

On the other hand, Hume was as Scotch as Voltaire was French. He had none of the personal brilliancy, and general passion and aptitude for excelling in every conceivable subject, which enabled Voltaire to pass a great part of his life in the midst of a perpetual flourish of trumpets. He did not feel—at all events, he did not express—for the bulk of the human race, that savage and pitiless contempt which forms so prominent a feature in some of the writings of Voltaire. He had a far thicker skin, and had far less to irritate it. In reading Voltaire, the traces of a fierce indignation, like that which Swift commemorated on his tombstone, are everywhere apparent. He looked, and not without considerable reason, on

the society in which he lived, as corrupt and abominable in a thousand ways ; but this does not seem to have been the case with Hume. On the whole, Hume would appear not to have been dissatisfied with the arrangements of the world in which he found himself, and to have felt not only that he was well enough off, all things considered, but that the same might be affirmed of most of those whom he addressed.

Few things can set in a clearer light the difference between France and England in the eighteenth century than the difference between the assumptions which pervade the writings of Hume and of Voltaire as to the state of their readers' minds. In every page may be seen proofs of the fact that Hume expects to be understood and appreciated by a much better satisfied, and a less exclusive class of readers than Voltaire.

Hume's Essays are far more characteristic than his History of England, and give his readers much more insight into his mind. They are of very various degrees of merit ; and those which constitute, in the common editions, the first part, which were originally published by themselves when their author was quite a young man, are greatly inferior to those which belong to the second part, published ten years afterwards. Some have about them a sort of debating-society air, and all convey the impression that the author is feeling his way and learning his business, and that he has not yet discovered, either the true

direction of his powers, or the real bearing of his views.

With the Essays in the second part it is quite different. They are open to many and very serious objections, but when they are considered either in an artistic or an intellectual point of view, they are entitled to the very highest praise. They are perfect models of quiet, vigorous, and yet graceful composition, as full of thought as any writings need to be, yet never so much compressed as to impose needless labour on the reader. As to their intellectual merits, it is almost superfluous to praise them. They are the most complete, the most powerful, and, in essentials, though not always in language, the most accurate pieces of mental workmanship which the last century produced in Scotland. They contain the germ of all the most active and fruitful speculations of our own day; and it is curious, in reading them over, to see how very little subsequent speculation has added to a great part of what Hume wrote.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature about the Essays is the substantial identity of the vein of thought which runs through a variety of subjects that are apparently, and at first sight, unconnected with each other. The subjects of the Essays, in the order in which they stand, are—political economy, politics metaphysics, morals, and theology. In short, Hume handles successively, and in the inverse order of their interest, most of the subjects which possess what, in these days, is sometimes described

as a 'human' interest—the subjects, that is, which relate directly to the concerns, the thoughts, the duties, and the prospects of mankind. Some of these topics are widely remote from each other. For instance, there is little apparent relation between an inquiry into the populousness of ancient nations, and an inquiry into the nature of benevolence or justice; but, if they are read continuously, it will be found that a certain unity of thought and method pervades the whole, and that the subjects in question were by no means chosen at random, or without a more or less distinct conception of the common method in which all were to be considered.

The great characteristic of this common vein of thought has sometimes been called scepticism. Hume himself often employs the word, and, apparently, was not altogether averse to it. The somewhat sluggish good nature of his temperament led him to enjoy the formal and avowed repudiation of responsibility for the world and its prospects. He liked to push it all on one side, and to say, in the concluding words of his *Essay on the Natural History of Religion*, 'The whole is a riddle, an enigma, an inexplicable mystery. Doubt, uncertainty, suspense of judgment appear the only result of our most accurate scrutiny concerning this subject.'

It is with such expressions as these, and with the habit of mind from which they spring, that Hume's name is generally associated. In popular denunciations Hume the Sceptic is always made to



balance Voltaire the Scoffer. He himself would very probably have accepted the name and been flattered by it, but it may be said with considerable confidence that, if he had really deserved it, he would never have enjoyed anything approaching to the reputation which, in fact, has belonged to him.

Mere scepticism—the bare power of collecting doubts and difficulties from all quarters upon all subjects—can never, from the nature of the case, exercise much permanent influence on mankind. A mere cloud-compeller is, as a rule, no more than an intellectual juggler, whose feats rapidly pall upon the spectators, especially when they get to see how they are done. Hume was much more than this. Under his scepticism and indifference lay a set of doctrines which are open to serious objection, and which are certainly incomplete, but which are as far from scepticism as light from darkness.

He was in truth what we should now call a Positivist, and the real gist of his scepticism is not to throw contempt on all human knowledge, but to throw contempt on particular sets of popular opinions which in his days were even more influential than they are in our own. Whatever may be the subject on which Hume is inquiring, he always propounds some distinct opinion, and that opinion is always founded on facts. His scepticism ends not in universal doubt, but in an attempt, and in many cases a very successful attempt, to show what are the foundations, and, in part at least, what are the limits

of real knowledge, and what phrases, professing to convey information, are in reality darkening counsel by words without understanding.

It appears to have been his greatest delight to show the ambiguities and contradictions latent in common words and modes of thought, and carefully and accurately to limit the degree of information which they do really afford. His analysis of the word 'power,' his inquiries into the nature of money, of interest, of causation, of justice, and many other subjects, are all conducted on the same principles. By applying all sorts of tests and putting every imaginable case, he ultimately arrives, not, as he sometimes affected to do, at mere doubt and difficulty, but at some result, involved, it may be, and implied in the common views of the subject, but generally supposed to form but a small and perhaps an unimportant part of the teaching contained in the established phraseology.

Hume, in fact, deserves to be regarded by no means as a sceptic, but as the founder, at least in this country, of the least sceptical and most positive of all schools of thought. A few words on each of the principal subjects of his investigations will set this in a clear light.

The arrangement of the subjects of his Essays is well worthy of notice. The order of subjects is, as we have said, political economy, politics, metaphysics, morals, theology—as if he had tried his strength and proved the justice of his method on the easier subjects,

and reserved for his most mature experience and reflection those of the deepest and most permanent interest. It is as if he had said to himself, 'Before going into such topics as morals and theology, where there is so much risk of being lost in clouds of words, I will give proof of the solidity of my principles and modes of thought by trying them on subjects like money and trade, where they may more readily be tested by the results.'

The first division of the second part of the Essays—for the first part is but a sort of prelude—refers to political economy, and includes, amongst others, the famous essays on money, interest, and the balance of trade. The general drift of these essays is too well known to require notice, but in order to show the identity of the method which they follow, and of the sort of results which they obtain, with those which are characteristic of the other inquiries of the author, a few words upon them may be necessary.

It is obvious that Hume had been irritated and baffled by the language which he was in the habit of hearing on common occasions about money, interest, and the balance of trade, and that he had set himself down solemnly to seek out and set in order what was really solid in the matter. He communicates to his readers, not the process, but the result of his reflections; and he throws that result into a highly dogmatic shape.

The whole Essay is an amplification and illustration of the following sentences: 'Money is not, properly

speaking, one of the subjects of commerce, but only the instrument which men have agreed upon to facilitate the exchange of one commodity for another.' The absolute quantity of the precious metals is a matter of great indifference. There are only two circumstances of any importance, viz. their gradual increase, and their thorough recognition and circulation through the State.'

In the same way, the essay on Interest is summed up in three lines: 'High interest arises from three circumstances—•a great demand for borrowing, little riches to supply that demand, and great profits arising from commerce.' So his doctrine on the balance of trade falls into the following phrase: 'In short, a government has great reason to preserve with care its people and manufactures. Its money it may safely trust to the course of human affairs without fear and jealousy.' A great deal of scepticism, much rejecting of uncertain shifting phraseology, prepares the way for this dogmatism; but it all comes to dogmatism at last, and these dogmas, at all events, are usually accepted as true, and are acted on as such without hesitation.

• The political essays are, on the whole, of the same character as those on political economy, though the subject was, for obvious reasons, less congenial to the author, being more mixed up with matters of fact. There is one essay on the idea of a perfect commonwealth which would seem to have been a mere amusement, unlike everything else that its author ever

wrote, and of little or no value. Others, however, carry on the main vein of thought.

The essays on the Original Contract, on Passive Obedience, and on the Coalition of Parties, are all pervaded by constant repetitions of one keynote. Hume denies all *a priori* rights or maxims, and founds all his theories on the consideration of what exists as a fact. 'The true rule of government is the present established practice of the age. . . . Though an appeal to general opinion may justly, in the speculative sciences of metaphysics, natural philosophy, or astronomy, be esteemed unfair and inconclusive, yet in all questions with regard to morals, as well as criticism, there is really no other standard by which any controversy can ever be decided.'

The way in which these principles were applied to metaphysics is well known, though its connection with Hume's other opinions is perhaps hardly so well understood. The connection in this instance, however, was not merely real, but express and conscious. In his essay on the different species of philosophy, Hume says: 'Astronomers had long contented themselves with proving from the phenomena the true motions, order, and magnitude of the heavenly bodies; but a philosopher at last arose who seems, from the happiest reasoning, to have also determined the laws and forces by which the revolutions of the planets are governed and directed. The like has to be performed with regard to other parts of nature. And there is no reason to despair of equal success in our

inquiries concerning the mental powers and economy, if prosecuted with equal capacity and caution.'

It was this caution which specially distinguished Hume. His metaphysics, which have been described as so sceptical, are in truth little more than an attempt, by extreme simplicity in thinking and in the use of terms, to lay the foundation of a fruitful and really scientific treatment of the subject. We start, he says, with sensible impressions. Our reflections on these impressions are our ideas. You might suppose that these ideas or thoughts followed each other at random, but as a fact they do not. They suggest each other, or are associated, and this association falls into certain shapes—namely, resemblance, contiguity, and causation; which last is afterwards explained in the most celebrated essays of the whole volume to be a form of contiguity—namely, constant, and, as Mr. Mill afterwards added, unconditional sequence. The general result is, that metaphysics, in so far as they are sound, are based, not on reasoning, but on observed facts; or, to quote one of the pregnant sentences which are so characteristic of Hume—'All inferences from experience, therefore, are effects of custom, not reasoning.'

From these preliminary principles Hume advances to the consideration of facts which are rather psychological than metaphysical—Volition, Liberty and Necessity, and Belief. His account of Belief, which he considers under the head of Probability, is, perhaps, the least satisfactory of these inquiries, and his account

of Liberty and Necessity the most satisfactory. It is a new application of the old principle. He throws aside all phrases, taking a half-malicious pleasure in exposing their weakness, and goes straight to the facts by a road on which all the most intelligent subsequent inquirers have followed him. No one, he says, denies the general uniformity of human motives and conduct, nor does any one deny that we have 'a power of acting or not, according to the determinations of the will.' Though these determinations may, in his sense of the word, be caused—that is, uniformly preceded—by something else, they are the determinations of the person himself, and call forth either praise or blame. An omniscient observer might be able to foretell that a certain man will, under certain circumstances, do wrong, but this is what is meant by being a bad or weak man. A doctor can foretell that if a person with an aneurism in his arm lifted a weight of twenty pounds the artery would burst, and this is what is meant by having a bad artery.

This illustration naturally introduces an observation on Hume's *Essays on Morals*. He treats morality entirely as a matter of fact. As a fact, moral distinctions are established amongst us. On what are they ultimately founded? To this Hume replies, that we have, as a fact, certain passions, amongst which are love and hatred, goodwill, or the wish to please, ill-will, or the wish to hurt, etc.; and, given the fact that men are living together in some sort of society, these passions will raise in those who observe them a

variety of sentiments. And when the whole matter is considered, we observe, as a fact, 'that everything which contributes to the happiness of society recommends itself directly to our approbation and goodwill;' and thus he defines virtue as the aggregate of qualities either useful or agreeable to ourselves or others.

But what is the obligation to virtue? Here, it must be owned, Hume is at a considerable loss. After putting the usual case of moderate and successful villainy, he is reduced to saying: 'I must confess that, if a man thinks that this reasoning much requires an answer, it will be a little difficult to find any which will appear to him satisfactory and convincing. If his heart rebels not against such pernicious maxims, if he feels no reluctance at the thoughts of villainy and baseness, he has, indeed, lost a considerable motive to virtue, and we may expect that his practice will be answerable to his speculation.'

More follows to the same purpose, but the gist of it is that, if a man will be a rogue, he must be a rogue; he has nothing to fear but his own conscience, if he happens to have one—if not, so much the worse for his neighbours.

Hume's theological views are closely, and most consistently, connected with his views on other subjects. He regards the whole matter as a question of fact, and the care with which he separates between fact and speculation is extremely characteristic. If his statements are to be taken as entirely sincere, he



was himself a Deist, and was convinced of the existence of a God by that very argument from design which at present is so often treated with neglect and something like contempt. He says: 'Though the stupidity of men barbarous and uninstructed be so great that they may not see a Sovereign Author in the more obvious works of nature to which they are so much familiarised, yet it scarce seems possible that any one of good understanding should reject that idea when once it is suggested to him. A purpose, an intention, a design, is evident in everything, and when our comprehension is so far enlarged as to contemplate the first rise of this visible system, we must adopt with the strongest conviction the idea of some intelligent cause or author.

Though this was his own view of the subject, he maintained at great length, and with surprising acuteness, that the genesis of popular religions was altogether another matter, and ought to be viewed as a question of fact. A great part of the most audacious speculation of our own day is anticipated in his Essay on the Natural History of Religion, and, in particular, the main outlines of Comte's famous theory of the three stages of belief are to be found there. Here, for instance, is the 'fetichist' stage: 'There is a universal tendency amongst mankind to conceive all beings like themselves, and to transfer to every object those qualities with which they are familiarly acquainted, and of which they are intimately conscious.'

Here is the metaphysical stage: 'Nay, philosophers

cannot entirely exempt themselves from this natural frailty; but have oft ascribed to inanimate matter the horror of a vacuum, sympathies, antipathies, and other affections of human nature.'\*

The final or positive stage he does not describe, but his own essays are an admirable illustration of that which Comte understood by the expression. It may be observed, by the way, that his examination of the meaning of the word 'power,' in the Essay on the Idea of Necessary Connection, is a complete anticipation of one of Comte's favourite theories.

Such is a slight and imperfect sketch of one of the most memorable philosophical works of the last century—a work which has had a vast influence on the thoughts, and consequently on the opinions and conduct, of the most eminent writers of this and other countries. To attempt, on the present occasion, to criticise it in anything like an adequate manner, would be presumptuous and absurd, but it may be interesting to refer to one or two of the more obvious of the considerations which it suggests.

No philosophy is worth having except in so far as it has reference to human life, and tends to make it better, happier, or wiser; and this is the only reason—a sufficient and conclusive one, no doubt—why true philosophy is better than false. There is also a great deal to be said for the proposition that the method of inquiry adopted by Hume is the true one—that philosophy ought to be thrown into the form of a careful mapping out of the facts amongst which we

live, without regard to our preconceived notions, by which means we may ultimately arrive at clear notions about the world in which we live, and the resources of which we can dispose.

This method can unquestionably point to considerable results. Both in political economy, and, to some extent, in law, or rather in jurisprudence, principles have been established which have produced, and will no doubt continue to produce, at an increasing rate, highly beneficial effects on mankind. What results will follow when history, morality, and the management of the institutions founded on morality, such as politics and theology, have been fully explored by the same mode of inquiry, it would be presumptuous even to conjecture. We may learn a great deal, or we may learn very little, and may discover that, after all, there is not much to be known.

The fault, not of Hume's inquiries, but of inquirers like Hume, usually is that they treat with contempt a collateral question which is of great importance to the world at large, and especially, though they may not see it, to themselves and their own speculations. That question is, what is to become of the world in the meanwhile? One of the great difficulties of navigation is to get a fixed point from which to take your observations. If you could only persuade the ship to stand perfectly still for a given time, it would save a vast deal of trouble. It is just the same with respect to all those branches of philosophy which have special immediate reference to human life and interests.

Work out your philosophical politics and religion by all means, but the world cannot in the meantime wipe out its Churches, its Parliaments, and its Courts of Law.

Nor is this all. The philosopher himself is a man, connected by the closest possible ties with the world on which he speculates. He is a citizen, he is a friend; he is very probably a husband and a father, he may exercise some profession; if he does not, he is cut off from the most valuable sources of experience upon all subjects relating to human life. How is he to proceed in all these matters? Ought he, or not, to teach his children to say their prayers and go to church? How ought he, in respect of the same matters, to regulate his own conduct? The more fully the sceptical point of view is adopted, the greater the practical difficulty becomes.

Before coming to a final and conclusive determination on the subject, you have no more right to assume the falsehood than to assume the truth of a common opinion. Assume, for the sake of argument, that the opinion is true, and that you act upon the assumption that it is false pending inquiry into its truth, you obviously prejudice yourself against the truth, and diminish your chance of discovering it. A man who never prays assumes that it is not desirable to pray, and that assumption is as sure to bias his mind in a negative direction in an inquiry into the matter as the opposite assumption would be to bias him in the other.

Hence the first step towards true conclusions in inquiries of this kind is to settle our own position and allow for it. To do this is an infinitely complicated problem for any man; but it is a problem independent of, and separate from, the ultimate philosophical problem, and it is one of which ordinary men and philosophers each require the solution.

The two questions are, What is the truth on this subject? and what is it desirable for me, A. B. of Oxford Street in the parish of Marylebone, to act upon as true on Saturday, the 18th of July 1863? Few men really get beyond the second question. Very few of those who try to grapple with the first ever apprehend the existence, or attempt to provide for the solution, of the second. Hardly anything is more essential than that the importance, the distinctness, and the relation of the two questions should be fully and generally understood. If that were the case, ordinary people would cease to consider philosophers wicked, and philosophers would, perhaps, be sometimes reminded that the rest of the world are not altogether fools.

It should also be observed that Hume and other inquirers of the same class ought always to recollect, that they are only laying the foundations on which others must build. They are anatomists, and not physicians, and the consequence is that practical questions are apt to be their weak point. Hume, for instance, explains with admirable clearness what is meant by virtue and vice, good and evil, and what is

the appropriate method of determining whether particular acts deserve the one or the other epithet ; but he breaks down altogether in attempting to show why men should be good, and he does not even attempt to show whether there are any means by which a bad man may become good. The practical importance of these questions is at least as great as that of the questions which he solves, and men are quite right in not waiting for a complete theoretical solution of them, before trying to find some way of proximately answering them in practice. Without tentative bungling practice, no theory would ever be possible, and the two ought to go as much hand in hand, and to show the same sort of mutual respect, in morals and theology as they actually do in politics and medicine.

## XX

### GIBBON<sup>1</sup>

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It has become a sort of fashion to assert that knowledge which is not derived from original study is worthless, that ordinary histories are little more than handbooks or abridgments, and that those who are not in a position to carry their studies beyond such works will never obtain any knowledge worth having. The best answer to such observations is to be found in studying the books against which they are directed. The common sense of mankind has, as a matter of fact, adjudged to them a high rank in literature, and no competent reader can fairly give his mind to them without perceiving that the common sense of mankind is right.

Gibbon's History is, perhaps, the greatest work of the kind that ever was written. When the vastness of the plan, the nature of its execution, and the sort of instruction which it affords are all taken into account—and it requires more than one attentive reading of the whole book to form an adequate con-

<sup>1</sup> *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.*

ception of them—the mind receives a deep impression of the importance of a great book, and of the effects which may be produced by the concentration upon one great object of powers which, though perhaps not extraordinary either in quantity or quality, were certainly considerable, and were used with consummate judgment.

The first point which attracts attention in the *History of the Decline and Fall* is its general plan. It must, in all probability, have grown upon the author by degrees as the work itself proceeded; but it was a wonderful feat of that high form of imagination which is indispensable to the authors of scientific discoveries as much as to poets and painters, to see that such a work was possible, and to seize a point of view from which Christianity, Mahometanism, Roman Law, the irruptions of the different hordes of barbarians, and the politics of the Persian Empire might all be regarded as parts of one whole. There is hardly any important fact in the history of mankind, during the thousand years which constitute the period of transition from the ancient to the modern world, which does not enter more or less into the plan of Gibbon's work; yet, in reading it through, the mind is not made disagreeably conscious of any solution of continuity. Every chapter appears to fit into its proper place, and to stand in its due relation to the rest of the work. A few words will recall the principal features of this vast plan and show its general symmetry.



The Roman Empire, as established by Augustus and extended by some of his successors, included all that part of the world of which the ancients had any definite knowledge. The political system which they established was in its full vigour in the time of Hadrian and the Antonines, and so continued, with interruptions and occasional internal and personal revolutions, for some centuries. Its rivals were Persia on the East, and the barbarians on the North ; but the interruptions to the general tranquillity produced by these Powers were for a great length of time exceptional.

The most remarkable effect of its unity, and that which contributed most powerfully to its maintenance, was the system of Roman law. The existence of so vast a power, the uniformity of government and of sentiment which it produced, and the general intercourse between different parts of the Empire which it favoured, gave an opportunity to the Christian Church of forming a State within the State, upon its own principles, under its own laws and administered by its own officers. By degrees, the Church superseded the State, converted the Emperors, and indirectly caused the change of the seat of government to Constantinople ; whilst the irruptions of horde after horde of barbarians into different provinces of the Empire, by breaking up the old political constitution, left the ecclesiastical constitution to ally itself with the new Governments, and ultimately to establish a spiritual dominion over them, animated to a great extent by

the spirit of the old Roman Empire, and closely analogous to its form.

Whilst this process was calling into existence a new political system throughout the whole of the Western world, the Eastern branch of the Empire was continually being diminished by the attacks of its enemies—the barbarians and the Persian Empire. At last the Mahometan power arose, and added to the list of its antagonists the one under which it was finally to succumb. It substituted for its ancient Persian rivals an enemy far more enterprising and infinitely more dangerous. By degrees the inexhaustible hordes of the North and the desperate fanaticism of the South washed away province after province, till Constantinople alone, with a small amount of territory, stood for the Empire of the East. Its fall was for a time delayed by the Crusades, but at last, on the 29th of May 1453— it was stormed and taken by Mahomet II., and with it fell the last vestige of the Roman Empire, though a sort of parody of some of its titles was maintained by the Emperors of Germany till it was swept away by Napoleon.

This, in a few words, is the subject of Gibbon's great work. Of the way in which it is executed there is but one opinion. No book has been more eagerly criticised by more unfavourable judges, and in none have fewer serious mistakes been discovered. Considering the vast variety of subjects which the work embraces—political and ecclesiastical history,

theology, Roman law, the origin of the Mahometan religion, the Crusades, the history of barbarians of every description, from the Goths who invaded the Empire in the third century to Genghis Khan and Timour who were the terror of the thirteenth and fourteenth—this is a wonderful success.

One of his German critics, Schlosser, has observed, apparently with the intention of depreciating his greatness, that Gibbon had wonderful dexterity in making use of the labours of others, and that much of his book is founded, not on original study, but on the compilations of others from the original authorities. This may very possibly be true. Gibbon's own journals show that hardly any kind of reading pleased him better than that of monographs, as they would be called in our days. The *Memoirs*, for instance, of the Academy of Inscriptions was one of his favourite books. This, however, only shows that he possessed in a remarkable degree one of the most valuable gifts which can belong to an historian—the gift, namely, of forming a sound judgment as to the value of his authorities. If he had tried to make for himself all the collections which were required for his book, his life would not have been long enough for the purpose. The slight importance of the mistakes which have been discovered in it, shows with what judgment he availed himself of the researches of others. If it is a reproach to use them, it is difficult to see what is the use of making them.

No moderately competent critic would think of

denying the general merits of Gibbon's history, but the question is sometimes asked, what, after all, can be learnt from it by those who are not going to use it as an index, which will enable them to turn to the authorities upon some one of the subjects to which it refers, and which they may want to study in detail? How is an ordinary reader substantially wiser than he was at first when he has read the whole story from the days of Augustus to those of Mahomet II.?

This is not altogether an idle question, for it must be owned that there are a considerable number of histories—for instance, the old Universal History—which, when they are read, leave on the mind no impression whatever except that of a directory somewhat enlarged, and filled with strange names, instead of familiar ones. What is the difference between the history which enriches the mind, and the almanack which merely fills it with the driest kind of sawdust? The answer can hardly be given in general terms, but it may be suggested by specifying a few of the chief reflections which Gibbon's history suggests, not to a professional historian or student, but to an ordinary reader.

The first, and perhaps the most obvious, of these observations is, that there is in many respects a strong analogy between the time in which we are now living, and the time when the Roman Empire was first consolidated, though there are many vital differences between the two. The process which has been carried on at a rapidly progressive rate since the French

Revolution, of throwing the whole civilised world into one vast community, animated by much the same spirit, in search of the same or similar objects, and recognising on the whole the same moral standard, is very much like the process which moulded all the nations round the Mediterranean into a single great body, of which Rome was the heart.

Of course the independence of the different European nations at once establishes a vital distinction between modern Europe and the Roman Empire ; but the obvious tendency of events is to diminish that difference, except in so far as it relates to the internal character of each separate nation.

The cant of the Peace Society, and of the sentimental writers who advocated its views, has fallen out of fashion, and this is one reason for insisting on the fact that there is every reason to believe that European wars will become rarer and rarer, and may at no very distant period be unknown. There are some outstanding quarrels to be fought out, and it would be rash indeed to guess how long the process may take, but Europe is evidently tending to a state of stable equilibrium. Indeed, its disturbances are composed with more ease, and excited with more difficulty, than was formerly the case ; and during our long intervals of repose, the degree of intercourse between country and country is infinitely greater than it ever was in old times.

Suppose, for the sake of argument, that this state of things became permanent—that the great leading

nations fixed upon forms of government suited to their wants and wishes, and that there was an unlimited degree of intercourse for all purposes between them—we should have come back to something very like the Roman Empire, that great historical tableland, on to which mankind by degrees emerged, after climbing up rough mountain sides in fifty different places.

No doubt the differences between our own state and theirs are both striking and profound. In the first place, Christianity was then struggling into existence. It has now been acting on the world for eighteen hundred years. We have infinitely more freedom and infinitely more knowledge than they, and thus there is every reason to suppose that the general standard of happiness in our times would, in any event, be far higher than it ever was under the Roman Empire; but it is not the less true that there is much general resemblance between the form into which our prospects appear to be falling, and that into which the prospects of, what was then the civilised world, actually did fall when the Empire was established.

To reach a stationary condition is the vision always before the eyes of philosophers in our days. For several centuries during the early part of the Roman Empire, considerable parts of Europe actually enjoyed a stationary condition. Nothing is more remarkable in Gibbon than the way in which large countries altogether fall out of history for great lengths of time. What, for instance, happened in Spain between the

Christian era and the invasion of the Vandals in the early part of the fifth century? For the whole of these four hundred years we know nothing or next to nothing about it, and nearly the same may be said of such of the other provinces of the Empire as were protected by their situation from the misfortunes which afflicted the frontiers.

If we consider for a moment what a space of time four centuries is—if we remember that it includes in our own history the whole interval between Henry VI. and this 26th year of the reign of Queen Victoria, that it includes the whole of the periods of the Tudors, the Stuarts, the House of Brunswick and our own century—that it has seen the population of England increased at least five or six fold, and its riches increased perhaps five hundred fold—we get some sort of measure of the strange immobility which appears to have brooded over large portions of the civilised world during that portion of their history.

With unbroken peace, light taxation, and great internal resources, it would seem that population and wealth at all events must have increased in Spain during those four hundred years. Did they increase? If so, why did the fact leave so few traces behind it? If not, why not?

Somewhat similar questions suggest themselves as to our own country. It is clear enough that, whilst Britain was a Roman province, it was both populous and rich. It contained towns and roads. It had considerable commerce, yet we know literally nothing

about its history. We do not even know that it had a history. Are we to suppose that during this long period human life underwent a sort of stagnation; and if it did, ought we to look forward to a similar result in our own time from the same tendency to a general state of equilibrium?

The moral and intellectual movement of the period in question took a direction by no means unlike that which some of our inquiries are taking in the present day. The great thing done by mankind during the long repose which the Roman Empire secured to them in certain respects, was the reduction of the Christian religion to the form into which it had to be thrown in order to take the command of the new world which was about to be born.

Though no man had less sympathy than Gibbon for religion in any shape, it forms, after all, the great feature in his book—a feature all the more impressive because the author himself disliked it so much. Nothing can be more instructive than his speculations on the reasons why Christianity prevailed, or than his portraits—quietly spiteful as a rule, yet never shown to be founded on absolute perversions of fact—of the men who were the leaders in the development of Christian doctrine and the establishment of the Christian Church. His very dislike of the men, his obvious preference for the comparatively few persons distinguished in secular careers who sometimes appear upon the dreary stage, makes the true nature of the case more apparent.



To say, as some of Gibbon's opponents in the last century used to say, that nothing could account for the success of Christianity except the theory that the early Christians had all gone through the process of being converted by arguments like Paley's *Evidences*, is absurd. The truth obviously is, that the whole current of events had brought prominently before men's minds, and pressed on their attention, those great problems of which Christianity offers a solution. It was almost the only subject—except, indeed, the practical art of government as embodied in law—in which they were disposed to take an interest under the circumstances in which they were placed.

The result of the wars and conquests by which the Empire was formed had been to bring the whole civilised world into one body politic, under a form of government which left little room for patriotism, and made apparently no demands on the affections of its subjects. The different provinces were closely connected by trade; no one of them had any such current history, so to speak, as to enlist the affections of the population; and the course of life, as it was regulated by the institutions of Rome, would seem to have been harsh and dry.

To people so situated, and filled with the eager passions which have always distinguished Europeans from Asiatics, the moral attractions of Christianity must have been irresistible. Except to that small minority which exists in all countries, and which has a pedantic love for existing laws and established

institutions, Christianity was the only object which could win affection. The double attraction of an austere moral code and of a limited but powerful philanthropy was quite enough to win over all the more powerful and ardent minds, whilst it could impose its own terms on the lukewarm majority.

In order to understand the force of the appeal which Christianity made to men's feelings and understandings in those days, we must combine with the influences which it exercises at present something of that indignation against a whole world lying in wickedness, which gave so vehement an impulse and so strange a charm to the French Revolution. The imperfections, the occasional baseness, the dishonesty and onesidedness which Gibbon so skilfully and so carefully points out in many of the Fathers of the Church, show that the fascination lay in the doctrine, and not in the men.

Looking at the growth of Christianity from the merely human point of view, it might be described as the result of the efforts of the human race, after attaining to such material elements of prosperity as a vigorous police could supply, to rise to something higher, and to put into form those relations towards each other, and towards their Maker, which mere law can never effectually sanction.

Should we arrive at a solution of our political problems analogous to that which the Romans discovered for those of their day, a set of problems analogous to those of which they sought the solution

in Christianity would present themselves to us. Indeed, they are already beginning to present themselves. Many people in these days, especially the more ardent and excitable part of the community, are beginning to ask, with more or less petulance, what is to be done with physical science and political freedom when we have got them? What is to be the use of civilisation? This is neither an empty nor an idle question. It is very like to the questions which were asked by the early Christians, though it is put in a different tone, and it is quite possible that the most interesting facts in the history of the world for centuries to come may be those which bear upon the answers gradually worked out for it.

One singular question is suggested by Gibbon, in connection with this matter, to which it would be highly important to get a satisfactory answer. There can be no doubt that Christianity exercised a most powerful moral influence over the Roman Empire—how came it not to arrest its fall? The monastic and ascetic view of religion goes some way towards answering this question; but all the Christians were not monks, and the mere improvement of morals ought to have had more effect, both on the numbers and on the courage of the people, than it would seem to have had in fact.

The answers given to this question by the great Christian writers, and especially by St. Augustine in the *De Civitate Dei*, involve an admission that the problem of seeing how the duties of a citizen are

involved in those of a Christian, had not then been solved, even if they had occurred to those who should have solved them.

When the Roman Empire fell, Christianity had, existed long enough to have done something considerable in this direction. In modern times, temporal prosperity has almost always attended the spread of Christianity, obviously because nothing has so strong a tendency to make people rich as industry and morality. Wesley, for instance, was grievously embarrassed by the prosperity of his congregations, and he could see no way out of the temptation to worldly habits which the growth of riches involved, short of enforcing it as a positive duty to give away in charity all one's superfluities.

Perhaps the most remarkable of the innumerable episodes which render Gibbon's History the richest of books, is his account of the rise and progress of Mahometanism. It is much to be wished that some one equal to the task would describe the subject in an adequate manner, and with a greater degree of collateral knowledge than Gibbon's plan required. Amongst the great events of history it stands next to the introduction of Christianity itself, and of the great religions which have permanently and deeply influenced the human race, it is the only one, except Christianity, of the origin and progress of which it is possible to give an authentic account.

Of the creeds of Brahma and Buddha we can tell very little, and the difference between ourselves and

the races which profess those religions is so great that it is probable that, if we had an authentic history of them, we should not be able to enter into the feelings from which they sprang.

With Mahometanism it is otherwise. Its cardinal doctrine is also the cardinal doctrine of Christianity. Why did it burst out like a conflagration at that particular time and place? Why did it spread over vast regions in an incredibly short time? and why did it spread no farther? Why—and this is, perhaps, the most curious question of all—did it ally itself up to a certain point with science and civilisation, and then stop short and become the enemy of both?

All these are most curious questions, and though Gibbon's animated history prompts his readers to ask them, it gives them no satisfaction. One singular point in connection with this matter is, that Genghis Khan, the greatest of all conquerors, was a theist, pure and simple. 'His first and only article of faith was the existence of one God, the Author of all good, who fills by his presence the heavens and the earth which he has created by his power.'

It is curious that the very same creed which, in the case of Mahomet, was the source of endless wars, and the very symbol of conquest, should have been, in the hands of another great conqueror, a reason for universal toleration. Genghis conquered a wider region than Mahomet, but his principle was to interfere with no man's creed. Where did this faith, at once so simple and so refined, come from in

these two cases—parallel in so many respects—and why did it produce, or accompany, such opposite results?

Gibbon's *History* is a mine of such questions. It is a comprehensive view of one great stage in the history of the world, and those who stand at the beginning of another stage, probably still more momentous, must contemplate the prospect which his work opens with endless interest and sympathy.

## XXI

### GIBBON'S MEMOIRS<sup>1</sup>

ENGLISH literature is by no means rich in Memoirs, but it does contain a few of great merit, and Gibbon's account of his own life and writings stands very near the head of the list. It may, indeed, be doubted whether any writer of the same kind of eminence has given so complete a picture of himself and of his works.

In the first place, the list of writers at all in the same line with Gibbon is by no means long ; and, in the next place, of that small number, a still smaller minority have betaken themselves to autobiography. Hume gave a short account of himself, which has considerable resemblance in many particulars to Gibbon's Memoirs. Clarendon's Life may also be fairly compared to them ; but Hume's autobiography is much shorter than Gibbon's, and Clarendon's Life is rather a history of his own times than an account of himself and his pursuits. On the

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of My Life and Writings.* By Edward Gibbon.

whole, it would certainly be difficult to find an exact, or nearly exact, counterpart in English to Gibbon's Memoirs.

The book is exquisitely characteristic. The opening sentences are in themselves a miniature of all that follows: 'In the fifty-second year of my age, after the completion of an arduous and successful work, I now propose to employ some moments of my leisure in reviewing the simple transactions of a private and solitary life. Truth, naked, unblushing truth, the first virtue of more serious history, must be the sole recommendation of this personal narrative. The style shall be simple and familiar; but style is the image of character, and the habits of correct writing may produce without labour or design the appearance of art and study. My own amusement is my motive, and will be my reward; and if these sheets are communicated to some discreet and indulgent friends, they will be secreted from the public eye till the author shall be removed beyond the reach of criticism or ridicule.'

The man who could solemnly sit down to amuse himself after this fashion must have been no common person. Something more than the 'habit of correct writing' was necessary to the production of this strange seesaw. 'Truth, naked, unblushing truth' is introduced with a cross between irony and pomposity which is admirably characteristic of the half-conscious grimace which Gibbon never laid aside. There is prefixed to the quarto edition (1866) of his



Miscellaneous Works a portrait taken from a figure of him cut out from black paper, with a pair of scissors, in his absence, by a Mrs. Brown, which looks as if it was in the very act of uttering some such sentiment. It is the figure of a very short, fat man, as upright as if he had swallowed a poker, and surmounted by a face a little like the late Mr. Buckle's. He wears a pigtail, and holds a snuff-box, which balance each other in such a manner as to give the squat figure with its big head and its little bits of legs, a strange look of formality, struggling with a desire to shine.

Gibbon was born at Putney on the 27th of April (O.S.) 1737. As he justly observes, 'My lot might have been that of a slave, a savage, or a peasant'; but, in fact, his father was a man of old family and some property. His grandfather, Edward Gibbon, was one of the directors of the South Sea Company, and was punished, by Act of Parliament, for the part which he had taken in that scheme, by a fine of nearly £100,000, which absorbed more than nine-tenths of his whole property. Such, however, was his industry and good luck that between the ages of fifty-six, when he was fined, and of seventy, when he died, he made a second fortune nearly as large as the first.

After being sent to various schools, Westminster amongst the rest, for nearly two years, Gibbon was sent to Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1752, in his fifteenth year. It was whilst there that he became a Roman Catholic (8th June 1753), and in consequence

of this change of religion he was removed from the University by his father, and settled, by the 30th of June, at Lausanne, under the care of a Protestant clergyman, M. Pavillard. M. Pavillard and his own reflections combined re-converted him by the end of 1754. There he remained, studying in real earnest, till April 1758.

He made one tour during this period, to which our modern habits give a certain interest. More than thirty years afterwards he carefully recorded a route which a tourist of our days would no more think of recollecting than of commemorating all his morning walks. It lasted a month, and led him from Lausanne to Iverdun, Neuchâtel, Bienne, Soleure, Basle, Baden, Zurich, Lucerne, Berne, and so back to Lausanne. It is odd to find him remarking, in 1789, 'The fashion of climbing the mountains and reviewing the glaciers had not yet been introduced by foreign travellers.'

In April 1758 he returned to London; and in May 1760 he went into the Hampshire Militia, writing his first performance, an *Essay on the Study of Literature*, in 1759. It was published in 1761. From May 1760 to December 1762 the Hampshire Militia were embodied, and Gibbon led the life of an officer in a marching regiment. He was captain of the grenadier company, and of all grenadiers past or present he must surely have been one of the strangest.

After the militia were disbanded, he travelled to Paris (January—May 1763), and after passing nearly

a year (May 1763—April 1764) at Lausanne, he went on to Florence, Rome, and Naples. It is in his notice of this visit that the well-known passage occurs about the first conception of the *Decline and Fall*, and for once the language suits very well with the thought. 'It was at Rome, on the 15th of October 1764, as I sat musing among the ruins of the Capitol, while the barefooted friars were singing vespers in the Temple of Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the city first started to my mind.'

He returned to his father's house on the 25th of June 1765, and passed the next five years in forming various literary plans, which came to little. He proposed, for one thing, to write a history of the foundation of the Swiss Republic, and it is a singular illustration of the change which has taken place in European literature, that he not only knew no German at all, but did not think it worth learning, and trusted to getting translations of his materials made for him by a Swiss friend.

He made an attack upon Warburton's famous paradox as to the nature of the Sixth Book of the *Æneid*, and he also set up, in association with a M. Deyverdun, a literary review, published in French. In November 1770 his father died; and in December 1772 Gibbon had settled his affairs and established himself in comfortable independence in London, at the age of thirty-five.

As soon as he was well established he set to work to write the *Decline and Fall*, and published the first

volume, which included the famous chapters on Christianity, in 1776. During this time he was a silent member for Liskeard, by the favour of Lord Eliot. He was no speaker, and was besides afraid of his own reputation, or, to use his own singular dialect, 'Timidity was fortified by pride, and even the success of my pen discouraged the trial of my voice.' The publication of the first instalment of the History was followed by a hot controversy, in which Gibbon was moved to reply for once, but only for once, to his antagonists. It was at this time, too, that he published his famous 'Mémoire justificatif' against the proceedings of the French Government in the matter of the American war. After holding office for a short time as a member of the Board of Trade, he ceased to sit in Parliament, and removed to Lausanne in 1783, to finish his History at his leisure. He finished it on the 27th of June 1787.

Perhaps the best passage in his Memoirs is the well-known one in which this is described: 'It was on the day or rather night of the 27th of June 1787, between the hours of eleven and twelve, that I wrote the last line of the last page, in a summer-house in my garden. After laying down my pen I took several turns in a *berceau*, or covered walk, of acacias which commands a prospect of the country, the lake, and the mountains. The air was temperate, the sky was serene, the silver orb of the moon was reflected from the waters, and all nature was silent. I will not describe the first emotions of

joy on the recovery of my freedom, and perhaps the establishment of my fame; but my pride was soon humbled, and a sober melancholy was spread over my mind, by the idea that I had taken an everlasting leave of an old and agreeable companion, and that, whatsoever might be the future date of my History, the life of the historian must be short and precarious.'

Gibbon returned to England in the spring of 1793, and died in London on the 16th of January 1794, at the age of fifty-seven.

Such is the outline of his life. Quiet as it was, it contains incidents which have some general interest, and which throw a light on several of the great topics of the time in which he lived. The first question which the life suggests is, What manner of man was Gibbon himself? for there can be no doubt that, whatever else he may have been, he was the author of one of the very greatest books in the English language.

He does not appear to have impressed his contemporaries by mother wit and general force of character. One of them said of him, that he might have been cut out of an odd corner of Burke's mind without being missed, yet nothing can be more certain than that his History is a work of infinitely greater and more lasting importance than all that Burke ever wrote. It is easy to understand this estimate as we read his Memoirs. They convey almost any impression rather than that their author was a great man as well as a great writer, and indeed

they supply clear evidence that the two characters may be entirely distinct.

Probably no one ever enjoyed his life more thoroughly than Gibbon. It is hardly possible to imagine any existence more exquisitely pleasant in every particular. He had ease, good health till the latter part of his life, whatever he chose to take in the way of society, and that blessing of all blessings—a strong taste for a noble art, with the means and opportunity of systematically gratifying it.

He was a born student, and from the time when he first went to Lausanne, to the day of his death, he studied uninterruptedly and insatiably, yet he never appears to have thrown away his labour. He always read for a purpose, and seems on all occasions to have taken the direct road to the object of his study, whatever that might be. No man made greater use of the labours of others, or was less disposed to neglect any short cut to knowledge, in the shape of abridgments, reviews, or translations, which came in his way.

Still, however enviable and luxurious his life may have been, and however great were the results which he produced, his Memoirs give the impression that after all he was not a great man. His book was greater than the mind which produced it. One of his favourite remarks is that the style ought to be the image of the mind; and if, as was no doubt the case, this was true of himself, his mind must have been, to say the least, not a beautiful one. The

passage quoted above, as to the completion of his book, shows more human feeling than any other in his *Memoirs*.

Here and there; where he thinks he ought to be affected, his pathos comes in with a stiffness which has a singularly grotesque effect. Take, for instance, his account of the death of his father. After describing his various foibles in a manner which shows that he must have been a light, weak, foolish man, Gibbon feels that he has been a little hard, and tries to make amends: 'His graceful person, polite address, gentle manners, and unaffected cheerfulness recommended him to the favour of every company; and in the change of times and opinions his liberal spirit had long since delivered him from the zeal and prejudices of a Tory education. I submitted to the order of nature; and my grief was soothed by the conscious satisfaction that I had discharged all the duties of filial piety.'

Gibbon submitting to the order of nature must have been a touching spectacle. His account of his first and last love is equally characteristic: 'I hesitate from the apprehension of ridicule when I approach the delicate subject of my early love. . . . I understand by this passion the union of desire, friendship, and tenderness which is inspired by a single female, which prefers her to the rest of her sex, and which seeks her possession as the supreme or the sole happiness of our being. I need not blush at recollecting the object of my choice; and though my love was disappointed of success, I am rather

proud that I was once capable of feeling such a pure and exalted sentiment.'

The lady was afterwards Madame Necker, and though Gibbon 'might presume to hope that' he 'had made some impression on a virtuous heart,' his father would not hear of it. 'After a painful struggle, I yielded to my fate. I sighed as a lover; I obeyed as a son.'<sup>1</sup> The application of such a style to such a subject paints the man almost as well as the black paper figure snipped out by Mrs. Brown's scissors, and exactly corresponds with the notion of him which his History suggests. It contains any quantity of information, it shows a marvellous power of arrangement, it abounds in successful turns of speech; but after reading it several times, and with a constantly increasing appreciation of the extraordinary merits of the performance, it is impossible not to feel that we have been reading an excellent account of some of the greatest events in human history, by a man whose whole conception of history was commonplace and second-rate.

There are several incidental events in Gibbon's life which have a good deal of general interest. His account of the utterly contemptible state of education—if indeed it could be said, by the widest stretch of courtesy, to deserve any such name—which prevailed in his time at Oxford, is too well known to justify

<sup>1</sup> It now appears in the excellent *Memoirs of Madame de Staël*, published in 1888, by Lady Blennerhasset, that the impression he made was deeper than he supposed. Vol. i. pp. 28, 29.



more than a passing allusion ; but the glimpse which he gives of Protestant Switzerland forms an interesting contrast to his description of Oxford.

The literary activity of the French and Swiss Protestants all through the early part, and up to the middle of the eighteenth century, is a chapter in literary history which has now fallen a great deal out of date, but which has much interest. It is obvious, from Gibbon's account of his own studies, that he was trained to think and read according to the methods then in use in Switzerland, and they certainly show a comprehensiveness, and solidity of design, very unlike anything which was at that day, or indeed is in these days, to be had in England.

Apart from this, his *Memoirs* draw clearly enough, though without any premeditated design of doing so, a picture of the progress of his own mind which is of the highest interest. It is as well worth attention in its way as any of the accounts of their religious opinions, which are so freely given to us in the present day, by almost every person who rises to much eminence in controversial literature.

Gibbon was the least sentimental of human beings, yet his mental history is as distinctly the history of his religious opinions as Dr. Newman's *Apologia* is of his. The *Decline and Fall* is throughout an oblique attack on theology in general, and the *Memoirs* sufficiently show that this was the subject which from the very first had most deeply engaged Gibbon's attention. 'From my childhood,' he says, 'I had

been fond of religious disputation; my poor aunt (Miss Porter, 'who brought him up) has been often puzzled by the mysteries which she strove to believe.' Another aunt (his father's sister) had been under the spiritual direction of Law the mystic, and Gibbon was thus born to controversy.

At Oxford 'the blind activity of idleness' impelled him to read Middleton's *Free Inquiry*. Yet he could not bring himself to follow Middleton in his attack on the early Fathers, or to give up the notion that miracles were worked in the early Church for at least four or five centuries. 'But I was unable to resist the weight of historical evidence that within the same period most of the leading doctrines of Popery were already introduced in theory and practice; nor was the conclusion absurd that miracles are the test of truth, and that the Church must be orthodox and pure which was so often approved by the visible interposition of the Deity.'

From the miracles affirmed by Basil, Chrysostom, Augustine, and Jerome, he inferred that celibacy was superior to marriage, that saints were to be invoked, prayers for the dead said, and the real presence believed in; and whilst in this frame of mind he fell in with Bossuet's *Exposition* and his *History of the Variations*. 'I read,' he says in his affected way, 'I applauded, I believed;' and he adds with truth, in reference to Bossuet, 'I surely fell by a noble hand.' 'In my present feelings it seems incredible that I should ever have believed in transubstantiation; but my conqueror oppressed me with the sacramental

words, and dashed against each other the figurative half-meanings, of the Protestant sects.'

Nothing can be less like the process by which the conversions to Popery of our own day have been obtained. In almost every instance in which the journey from Oxford to Rome has been made, the moving power has been moral sympathy, far more than any intellectual process; and in almost every case this has been accompanied by a dread, more or less consciously entertained and explicitly avowed, of the possible results of Protestantism.

No one, we will venture to say, has been converted in the nineteenth century by a belief that, as a fact, miracles were worked in the early Church, and that, as a consequence, the doctrines professed at the same time must have been true. As a rule, the doctrines have carried the miracles. People have longed for the rest, the guidance, and the supposed guarantee for a supernatural order of things to be had from the Roman Catholic system, and have believed the specific Roman doctrines in order to get these advantages. The fact that the process began at the other end with Gibbon is characteristic both of the man and of the age; but it is put in a still stronger light, by the account which he gives of the process of his re-conversion. 'M. Pavillard,' says Lord Sheffield, Gibbon's editor, 'has described to me the astonishment with which he gazed on Mr. Gibbon standing before him, a thin little figure with a large head, disputing and urging with the greatest ability all the best argu-

ments that had ever been used in favour of Popery.' The process from first to last was emphatically an intellectual one.

A curious letter from Pavilland to Gibbon's father gives a singular account of it : 'Je me persuadois' (he says) 'que quand j'aurois détruit les principales erreurs de l'Église Romaine je n'aurois qu'à faire voir que les autres sont des conséquences des premières, et qu'elles ne peuvent subsister quand les fondamentales sont renversées ; mais je me suis trompé, il a fallu traiter chaque article dans son entier.'

He afterwards says, 'J'ai renversé l'infailibilité de l'Église,' etc. etc., counting up all the powerful Roman Catholic doctrines ; and then he adds, 'Je me flatte qu'après avoir obtenu la victoire sur ces articles je l'aurai sur le reste avec le secours de Dieu.' Gibbon himself observes : 'I still remember my solitary transport at the discovery of a philosophical argument against the doctrine of transubstantiation ; that the text of Scripture which seems to inculcate the real presence is attested only by a single sense—our sight ; while the real presence itself is disproved by three of our senses—the sight, the touch, and the taste.'

He might, by the way, have recollected the famous Latin hymn which puts the same thought in another form, oddly enough making the hearing the one sense which supports the doctrine—

Visus tactus gustus.

Gibbon's studies after his re-conversion all lay in the direction which he followed up so effectively in

the *Decline and Fall*. He began with Crousaz' Logic, and then went into Locke and Bayle, and he specifies three books as having had a particular influence over him. (1) From Pascal's *Provincial Letters*, 'which almost every year I have perused with new pleasure, I learned to manage the weapon of grave and temperate irony, even on subjects of ecclesiastical solemnity.' (2) The Abbé de la Bleterie's *Life of Julian*; and (3) Giannone's *Civil History of Naples*, in which 'I observed with a critical eye the progress and abuse of sacerdotal power.'

These books sufficiently indicate the course in which his mind must have been running during his studies at Lausanne. The general impression which his account of his studies there and afterwards conveys is, that he formed early in life a set of opinions and sympathies which found their complete and natural expression in the *Decline and Fall*, and which it would have been very difficult, if not impossible, for him to have expressed so fully in any other shape.

Several Histories of our own time might be named—Mr. Grote's *History of Greece*, for instance—which express the author's views upon almost all the great topics of moral and political interest, in the same sort of way in which novels of a certain kind express the sentiments of authors of a lighter cast. It would be impossible to reduce Gibbon's History to the form of propositions, yet the reader feels, at every page, that it is quite as much a vehicle for the author's senti-

ments on every sort of subject, as a narrative told for the sake of the events which it relates; and the Memoirs enable us to see the process as it actually took place.

There are some passages in the Memoirs which move the admiration and envy of those who are not able to dispose of their time, and to lay out the plan of their studies, like Gibbon. These are the passages which describe the way in which he prepared himself to get all the instruction that was to be got out of his journeys. When about to go to Rome, he 'diligently read the elaborate treatises which fill the fourth volume of the Roman Antiquities of Grævius.' Also, the *Italia Antiqua* of Cluverius, in two volumes; also Strabo, Pliny, Pomponius Mela, etc., from which he compiled a table of roads and distances reduced to English measure, and filled a folio commonplace-book about the geography of Italy and other kindred subjects. Lastly, he read Spanheim *De Præstantiâ et usu Numismatum*. All this was before he had any notion of writing the History of the *Decline and Fall*, and simply by way of a natural preparation for his journey. How many of us can read this, and not blush to think that our most elaborate preparations for such a journey have seldom gone beyond buying a Murray's Handbook, and perhaps a book of Italian Conversations?

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